**[Freedom from Time – Parshat Yitro](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/freedom-from-time-parshat-yitro)**

It is said that Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Rymonov used to complain: “As long as there were no roads, you would have to pause your journey at nightfall. Then you could relax at the inn and have all the time in the world to recite Psalms, open a book, have a nice conversation with someone. But now that there are roads, you can just ride on day and night, and there is no peace anymore!”

Rabbi Mendel lived in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Oh, I don’t think he would have liked how things have developed since then!

But there is one great remedy for the never ending flow of busyness, and that is *Shabbos.*For one who keeps *Shabbos,* the world stops; not because there is any change “out there” but because there is a complete shift “in here” – for one who keeps *Shabbos,*ordinary involvement with the world comes to a full pause.

The imagery in Kabbalah is that of intimate union within the Divine...

וַיְדַבֵּ֣ר אֱלֹהִ֔ים אֵ֛ת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִ֥ים הָאֵ֖לֶּה לֵאמֹֽר׃  אָֽנֹכִ֖י֙ יְהוָ֣ה אֱלֹהֶ֑֔יךָ אֲשֶׁ֧ר הוֹצֵאתִ֛יךָ מֵאֶ֥רֶץ מִצְרַ֖יִם מִבֵּ֣֥ית עֲבָדִֽ֑ים׃
*The Divine spoke all these words, saying: I am Existence, your own Divinity, that brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.*

The Divine is everything, but during the ordinary flow of time on weekdays, the constricting illusion of separation is generated by goal-oriented traveling in the highways of time. Then *Shabbat* comes – the sun sets, candles are lit, Psalms are sung, a book is read, but most importantly: the faint glow of Presence in all things becomes a bit brighter. We are brought out of the bondage of time, out of the busyness of *Mitzrayim.*

זָכ֛וֹר֩ אֶת־י֥֨וֹם הַשַּׁבָּ֖֜ת לְקַדְּשֽׁ֗וֹ
*Remember the day of Shabbat, to sanctify it…*

That glow is consciousness itself, and the consciousness in each recognizes itself in the other; the Godliness in me holds hands with the Godliness in you.

This is לְשֵׁם יִחוּד קוּדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא וּשְׁכִינְתֵּהּ – for the sake of unification of the Holy Blessed One with *Shekhinah,* the Divine Presence that is ever-present.

*Shabbat* is the fourth of the עֲשֶׂרֶת הַדִּבְּרוֹת the Ten Commandments. One way of understanding the Ten Commandments is by mapping them onto the ten *sefirot* of the Tree of Life. In this way, *Shabbat* gets associated with the fourth *sefirah, Hesed –* Loving-Kindness – hinting both at the love of all creation ignited by one who enters the sanctuary of *Shabbos,* as well as the realization that *Shabbat* itself is a gift, a supreme expression of loving-kindness toward us.

However, in Kabbalah, *Shabbat* is often associated with the tenth *sefirah, Malkhut,*because *Malkhut* represents *Shekhinah,* the imminent and indwelling feminine Divine Presence that comes into union with *Kudsha Brikh Hu,* the transcendent and masculine Divinity.
לְכָה דודִי לִקְרַאת כַּלָּה. פְּנֵי שבָּת נְקַבְּלָה
*Go my beloved to greet the Bride; receive the Presence of Shabbat!*

The tenth commandment reads:

לֹ֥א תַחְמֹ֖ד בֵּ֣ית רֵעֶ֑ךָ ... וְכֹ֖ל אֲשֶׁ֥ר לְרֵעֶֽךָ׃
*You shall not covet your neighbor’s house… or anything that is your neighbor’s.*

One of the weekday activities that is most difficult for people to put aside on *Shabbat*tends to be not the traveling on the *physical* highway, but the *digital* highway of information. Beyond the crucial literal meaning of this *mitzvah* not to covet, there is also this inner meaning: let your mind release the image of your neighbor’s house, your neighbor’s business, and come fully into your own house, the “house” of this moment, the Eternal Present; let Her come and unite through your own becoming present; She is waiting for you...

***More on Parshat Yitro...***

[**Unlock Your Potential – Parshat Yitro**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/unlock-your-potential-parshat-yitro)

Years ago, I used to teach piano for a living, mostly to children. When they would make a mistake, most of them would just say “oops” and try again – no big deal. But there were always a few who wouldn’t be able to accept their own mistakes. They would become frustrated and cry and scream out: “I’ll never be able to do it!”

Of course I knew they could do it, if only they would relax and try again. I would ask them to please trust me – “Just you wait and see, you will be able to do it. Just try again a little more slowly.”

When you practice something, whether it’s playing piano or being present, you will inevitably get better and better at it. There’s no guarantee you’ll become as great as so-and-so, but you will get better – that’s just the way it works. And so, if your mind interferes by telling you that you’re not getting better fast enough, or even worse it tells you that you’ll never be able to do it, don’t get dragged into that drama. Know that you can and you will – you just need to stick with it.
Why?

וַיְדַבֵּ֣ר אֱלֹהִ֔ים אֵ֛ת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִ֥ים הָאֵ֖לֶּה לֵאמֹֽר׃  אָֽנֹכִ֖י֙ יְהוָ֣ה אֱלֹהֶ֑֔יךָ אֲשֶׁ֧ר הוֹצֵאתִ֛יךָ מֵאֶ֥רֶץ מִצְרַ֖יִם מִבֵּ֣֥ית עֲבָדִֽ֑ים׃  לֹֽ֣א יִהְיֶֽה־לְךָ֛֩ אֱלֹהִ֥֨ים אֲחֵרִ֖֜ים עַל־פָּנָֽ֗יַ
The Divine spoke all these words, saying: I am Existence, your own Divinity, that brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

This famous introduction to the “Ten Commandments” hint at a deeper truth: I am Existence, your own Divinity – your deepest “I” is not something separate from all Existence; it is your own inner Divinity.

Meaning: the dimension of the sacred – which we might call freedom, presence, or oneness – is already who you are at the deepest level. Beneath and beyond your thoughts, beneath and beyond your feelings, beneath and beyond your sensory experience – you are freedom. It may take time for you to know this fully in your experience, but it takes no time at all to be begin practicing – you can always do it now.

How?

לֹֽ֣א יִהְיֶֽה־לְךָ֛֩ אֱלֹהִ֥֨ים אֲחֵרִ֖֜ים עַל־פָּנָֽ֗י
There shall not be for you other gods before Me.

In order to function, we need our minds to form a mental map of the world so that we can navigate through life. As long as we understand the difference between the map and the territory, thought can be our most useful tool. But when we mistake our thoughts about reality for actual Reality, that’s idolatry on the deepest level. We take our own beliefs to be true, and thereby close ourselves off from intimacy with actual Reality: “I’ll never be able to do it!”

Instead, be open – don’t put reality into a mental box. Don’t insist; don’t impose. Let go of your stream of thinking and let awareness flow into your body, opening to the full potential of what could be. We don’t really know anything – except that we are conscious, right now.

Then you will know on the deepest level – Anokhi Hashem – your “I” – the deepest level of who you are – is not something other than the Divine you seek…

[**Four Dimensions of Presence with Others – Parshat Yitro**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/four-dimensions-of-presence-with-others-parshat-yitro)

This *parsha* begins with Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro, coming out to meet Moses and the Israelites in the wilderness. When Moses goes out to greet him, the Torah hints at four dimensions of being present with other people (Exodus 18:7):

1. *“Vayotzei Mosheh – Moses went out…”*The foundation of being present with another person is “going out” of our mental preconceptions, so that we can open to the person as they are.
2. *“Vayishtakhu – he prostrated…”* This means having respect for someone, being sensitive and relating to them in a harmonious way, such as listening and not interrupting.
3. *“Vayishak lo – he kissed him…”* While respect is a passive thing, being sensitive about what *not* to do, “kissing” means showing love in an active way. It need not be actual “kissing,” it might just mean a smile or a handshake.
4. *“Vayish’alu ish l’re’eihu l’shalom – they each asked the other about their welfare…”* The actual expression here is that they asked “for peace” *(l’shalom).* On the surface, this means being actively interested in the other in conversation. But on a deeper level, this is a type of spiritual inquiry in its own right:

*“What is the “shalom” – the eternal dimension – of this person standing before me?"*

In becoming aware of the eternal dimension of Being in another person, you also bring forth your own eternal dimension, and Being beholds Being…

[**One of These Things is Not Like the Others- Parshat Yitro**
​](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/one-of-these-things-is-not-like-the-others-parshat-yitro)
For some, spirituality is all about generosity and kindness.

For some, it’s about creativity.

For others, it’s going out into nature. Or going in, deep within yourself…

But while there are many different spiritual entry points for many different personality types, there’s one Thing to which all these qualities point, that's fundamentally different from the others.

In this week’s episode, Moses’ father-in-law Jethro (Yitro) goes out to meet Moses in the wilderness and give him some crucial advice. But first, Moses tells Jethro the whole story of how they escaped from Egypt, to which Jethro replies (Ex. 18:11):

“Atah yadati ki gadol Hashem mikol ha’elohim…”

This is usually translated:

       “Now I know that Hashem is greater than all the gods…”

The word for “gods” is “elohim”- a very interesting word, because not only does elohim mean “gods,” it's also a Name of God Itself. In fact, it’s the Name used in the beginning of the Torah when God creates the universe:

“Bereisheet bara ***Elohim*** et hashamayim v’et ha’aretz-
      “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth…”

So Elohim the Creator is the source of all the diversity in the universe. This plurality is hinted at by the Name itself, because Elohim is a plural word, which is why it can also mean “gods.”

In this sense, then, Elohim would mean “God of Plurality.”

But what does Hashem mean?

Hashem is the four letter unpronounceable Name YHVH that means “Existence” or “Being.”

So understood this way, it’s saying that Existence is the greatest Divine quality:

“***God***(Hashem- Beingness) is greater than ***God*** (Elohim- plurality of qualities)”

There are many Divine qualities- kindness, creativity, inwardness, connection with nature, and so on. But of all of them, the simple quality of Being is the greatest.

The nice thing about that is you don’t have to achieve Being. Everything is already just Being.

All of the many qualities (or middot) are important for shaping your life as an expression of Being.That’s the ongoing project of spiritual work on yourself and on the world.

But the project of just Being is a cessation from work. It’s an allowing of everything to be exactly as it is- and that’s the weekly project of Shabbat (Ex. 20:9):

“Sheishet yamim ta’avod v’asita kol m’lakhtekha-
     “Six days you shall labor and do all your work…”

Working to cultivate the Divine qualities, to create and maintain better forms and structures, is crucial. It’s the majority of what we’re here to do.

But the center of life is Shabbat- the center is Being-

“V’yom hashvi’i Shabbat Ladonai Elohekha-
       “And the seventh day is a Shabbat for the Divine…”

But if Being is the greatest quality, how do we come to experience and know this for ourselves?

The answer is in Jethro’s words-

**“Atah yadati**- ***NOW I KNOW*** (that God-Hashem- Beingness is greater than God-Elohim- plurality of qualities…)”

To truly **“know”**the Greatest Quality, you have to connect with the ***“Now.”*** In fact, the word for "know" is da'at, which also means intimacy. So it's not just an intellectual knowing, but a knowing through intimate connection.

This moment has a texture, a flavor, an aliveness, if you would but take a "Shabbat" to taste It, to feel It, to dive into It. Underneath all the doing, the cultivating, the creating, is the Divinity of this moment, always available, yet easily obscured.

Going back to the story- what was Jethro’s advice to Moses?

Precisely this- take a Shabbat!

Jethro saw that Moses would “burn out” as a leader if he didn’t delegate some of his duties and take some rest.

So on this Shabbat Yitro, the Sabbath of Advice, may we too take Jethro’s advice, to balance our doing with Being and taste the Greatness of Existence. May the shining Wholeness of Being reshape all our doing as well, bringing this world swiftly to realize peace, healing and sustenance for all.

Good Shabblisss!
​b Yosef

[**Lost and Found- Parshat Yitro**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/lost-and-found-parshat-yitro)

When I was young, I loved Spiderman. I also loved to dress up. But I didn’t want to dress up as Spiderman, which would be unoriginal, so I invented a new superhero: “Inchiderman”.

“Inchiderman” combined the powers of a spider with the powers of an inchworm. I don’t know why I thought the powers of an inchworm would be helpful, but he was my superhero. I put together the costume with a pair of tights, a red and blue winter coat and a paper mask I had made. I also constructed a web shooter from a syringe, which I filled with a combination of Crazy Glue, Elmer’s Glue and honey.

Back in those days I lived with my family on three acres of mostly woods in Pomona, New York. One day I went out into the woods dressed as Inchiderman with my dog Ophelia. I hiked out to the end of the woods, beyond which were apple orchards. I ventured into the orchards for a while and then came back to the woods. But, I couldn’t find the path that led back to my house. I wandered around for a while and eventually realized that I was lost. I started to panic and cry. I ran this way and that, crying and yelling, “Help!”

Ophelia, however, was happy. She jumped around and played while I freaked out. She wasn’t lost. I got mad and yelled at her- “Ophelia, take us home!” but she just jumped and played.

Eventually I stopped panicking. I was still scared and sad, but I stopped crying and running. Ophelia stopped too. She just looked at me, waiting to see what would happen next, but there was nothing next. I was just lost. Something within me had shifted. I can remember feeling the presence of the forest, the smell of the crisp air, the sound of the wind in the trees. My Inchiderman fantasy was gone, and I was just present with the forest and with Ophelia. Scared and sad, but present.

Then, out of nowhere, a man appeared and showed me the way to a path that led to the back of the swimming pond down the street from my house. Ophelia and I took the path and found the road. I carried my ripped Inchiderman mask and syringe web shooter back home.

In this week’s Torah reading, Parshat Yitro, the Israelites too were in the wilderness. They too had been panicking, complaining and crying to go back to Egypt. In this parsha they come to the foot of Mt. Sinai and prepare themselves to receive the Torah. The mountain quakes with fire and thunder. There is a sound of a blasting ram’s horn that begins quietly, then gets louder and louder. The people are terrified and tremble.

And then, from the midst of the cloud and fire, a Voice begins to speak the sayings that became known as the “Ten Commandments”-

“Anokhi Hashem Elohekha asher hotzeitikha etkhem me’eretz Mitrayim, mibeit avadim- I am Hashem your G-d who brought you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage…”

What exactly is this first “commandment”?

According to Maimonides (b. 1135- d.1204 CE) in his work Sefer HaMitzvot, the first commandment is just to believe in G-d, to acknowledge that G-d freed our ancestors from slavery.  But there is a message here that is not merely about the past or about belief, but rather it directly applies to this moment within which we now find ourselves:

“Anokhi Hashem” means that the “Anokhi,” the “I”, is actually “Hashem”- Divine. Meaning, the inner identity of everything is the ultimate, living Presence of Existence; that’s what the Divine Name actually means. The Israelites are shaken by the terrible awesomeness of the natural world around them, and in that heightened state, the inner identity of nature reveals Itself. It’s not about believing in the idea of a divine entity. It’s not about adding another concept to the mind’s ideas about reality. It’s about recognizing Existence Itself- recognizing That which the mind cannot map.

The next thing the Voice says is that It “brought you out from the land of Egypt.” Why is liberation particularly connected to the self-revelation of Divinity?

The mind is a mapping device. It is a navigation unit, constantly creating an inner context through which we know who and where we are and what we are doing. Very useful! But this creates the side effect of seeing reality through the screen of that map. The mind sees the surface of things- a collection of related but separate parts, and the mind also feels itself to be separate from what it sees.

But there comes a time when the inner map breaks down, and we are lost. Somehow we lose the continuity of the mind-created context and the familiar disappears. We step out of the Mitzrayim of the known, of the conditioned mental patterns of separateness. This "wilderness" can be terrifying. And yet, in the unknown there is the possibility of connecting with Reality in a very direct way, a way that knows Being as a Whole, as a Oneness. This knowing is itself liberation- liberation from the burden of time and conditioned identity.

When the Israelites receive this revelation, the text says “v’khol ha’am ro’im et hakolot- all the people saw the sounds.”  Not heard the sounds, but saw! In other words, they perceived everything in a completely new way. It is a kind of awakening.

I think that’s what happened to me that day in the woods when I got lost. After the initial terror and panic, after the “thunder and fire”, there was this stillness, this recognition. There was a new kind of seeing. And then, miraculously, the salvation that appeared.

The other night, my son and I were watching the new version of Cosmos with the physicist Neil deGrasse Tyson. Tyson began by defining our “cosmic address.” First, he showed us, we are on planet Earth. Then, the perspective pulls back to reveal our Solar System. Then, it pulled out even more to the  Milky Way Galaxy. Then even further to see the family of galaxies that the Milky Way is part of, called the Local Group. Then, even further, the Local Group was part of a larger cluster of galaxy families, called the Virgo Supercluster. Then it pulled out even further to view the many clusters that make up the Observable Universe.

But what comes after that? We had come to limits of our map, beyond which was simply mystery. He then hypothesized that our whole universe is merely a single bubble in an infinite ocean of bubbles, each one a complete universe. Now, where would that ocean be exactly? The imagination reaches out toward infinity and comes to stillness. Ultimately, we don’t and can’t know where or what or even why any of this is.  And yet we do know- Hinei!  Here it is!

Try it yourself-

Stretch your imagination out into the universe until you reach its boundaries. You may find that, in the sensation of trying to imagine the unimaginable, there is an emptying of the mind and a simple, blooming awareness of whatever is around you and within you now, in this moment.

When that begins to happen, just let it. Give up trying to "grasp" anything. Simply relax your sense of what is going on, of where you are, of who you are, of what you are doing. Don’t push it away, just let it go. Open yourself to this moment as it is unfolding, the way you would toward an intimate friend. Lose your self, find the One. Let the Anokhi- the inner Presence of Existence- take you into the freedom of this eternal present. And in the Light of that lightness, of that benevolent Presence that is also your own inner identity, may all of our words and actions shine for healing, love and peace. Amein. ​