

NFTY

CONVENTION

2021

Wendy Blickstein Memoria D'var Torah Competition

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Connect. Learn. Serve. What do these words really mean? What do they instruct us to do? Connect encourages us to form meaningful relationships with those around us. Learn inspires us to continue on a path of knowledge based in Jewish values. Serve calls us to be here for our communities and ourselves.

It is especially fitting that these three words truly embody the values of this week's Torah portion, in which Moses' father-in-law, Yitro, advises Moses that he has taken on too much work. Moses, all alone, had been serving as the sole judge for the Israelites. Day and night, people came to him for advice on how to live according to the laws and teachings of God. Yitro tells Moses that he will wear himself out from all the work and that he should seek out deputies to settle smaller issues. The delegation of tasks is often something that we are reluctant to do, but it can be crucial in managing our workload. Trusting his father-in-law, Moses obliges and appoints capable judges across the land.

In this instance, Yitro realizes that Moses needs help before Moses is able to come to terms with this reality himself. Although Moses may not be ready to ask for help, he willingly accepts it once it is thoughtfully offered by Yitro.

As it was for Moses, it can be difficult for us to admit when we need help. However, the support and advice of our loved ones, such as Yitro's support for Moses, can be exactly what we need to be successful.

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In an era of social distancing, asking for help can become even more challenging. Many of us are unable to spend time in person with the people whom we usually seek when we are struggling. Also, our need for help can often go unnoticed. When our need for help is overlooked

by those around us, it often becomes necessary to ask for help ourselves, which can be really difficult.

Oftentimes, when we feel lost, we turn to our Jewish community and our Jewish values. One really awesome aspect of Judaism is how it encourages us to ask questions about everything. What got us to where we are today? What do Jewish values say we ought to do in this situation? Is this really the right course of action? What will the effects be?

Asking and questioning in and of themselves are Jewish values. We are taught to ask for forgiveness when we have wronged others. We ask for prayers of healing when people are in need of a r'fuah sh'leimah, a complete healing. We ask for and even demand peace for our world. This culture of asking can and should be used to create a culture of caring and support for those who ask, as well as those who do not.

Asking for help often looks different depending on the person, the situation and the type of help needed. It may be getting a tutor for a class in which you are struggling, or asking another NFTYite to co-write a program or a service with you so you do not have to do it alone. The choice of asking is a crucial one, but the choice of supporting those around you is just as crucial in order to have a thriving community.

Recognizing when a parent is stressed with work and offering to unload the dishwasher or make dinner for the family are two ways you can support your home community with a culture of caring. Sometimes we are like Moses — the one in need of assistance — and sometimes we are like the judges who support and ease the workload for other people.

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One phrase from Exodus 18:22 encapsulates the culture of supporting those in our community. It translates to “Make it easier for yourself by letting them share the burden with you.”

Oftentimes, we may feel guilty for relying on our community when we need help. However, relying on our community is how we have gotten to where we are as Jewish people and is necessary for our collective future. For all the times we are in Moses’ role, not even recognizing that we are in need of assistance to survive, we also have times when we are in the role of the judges, supporting someone else’s “Moses Moment.”

*So NFTY, in this time of struggle and uncertainty, it is more important now than ever that we embrace our “Yitro Moments,” our “Moses Moments” and our “Judge Moments” in order to remain integral members of our communities. As we are encouraged to do through this weekend and beyond, we must **connect** with those around us, **learn** from each other, and **serve** our communities as well as our own needs. This is the only way that we will be able to move forward, survive, and thrive as the movement that we hold so dear to our hearts.*