



by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

YITRO

Kohanim or Prophets?

In the Bible there are two ways of being a religious leader.

One can be a kohen, concerned with rituals and practices, or a prophet who preaches the word of HaShem.

This week's portion defines Israel as a people of kohanim - MAMLECHET KOHANIM V'GOI KADOSH - "a kingdom of kohanim, a holy people" (Sh'mot 19:6).

We all minister to God in His sanctuary, not merely in the official house of worship but in the home (the MIKDASH M'AT, miniature temple), the factory, office, school and street. We have prayers to say, kashrut to maintain, Shabbats and festivals to honour.

Every day of the year, every stage in life has its rituals to observe. That might be called the particularistic dimension of Jewish identity: we are Jews "far zich" - "amongst ourselves".

From the example of Moshe (D'varim 34:10), we also learn that we are a

people of prophets with a universalistic mission amongst mankind. As prophets we belong to the world.

ALEINU, the great concluding prayer of every Jewish service, written by Rav in the 3rd century CE, sums up our two dimensions: particularism in the first paragraph, universalism in the second.

The prophetic role begins with Judaism but is capable of being shared by other peoples.

Yitro's 7 Names

People's names in the Bible all have a special meaning.

In the case of Yitro - there are seven names and seven meanings, according to rabbinic midrash.

His two main names are connected with a root that means "additional" - he was "Yitro" because he performed extra good deeds and "Yeter" because he caused extra texts to enter the Torah.

He was "Chovav" because he was beloved of God, "Re'u'el" because he was God's friend, "Chever" because he was a close associate of the Almighty, "Puti'el" because he abandoned idolatry, and "Keini" because he was zealous for God.

Many people these days acquire their names just because of what is fashionable at the time or because

their parents liked the sound of a particular name. Biblical parents were more creative and thought hard about what they wanted their child's name to express.

In modern Israel this type of creativity has come to the fore again, and sometimes there are names that are specially coined for the occasion.

It can be a good idea. We need to encourage parents everywhere to invent names with more than mere sound to recommend them.

Of course in many cases the task has already been done by family tradition and the name of a precious loved one is perpetuated in a new generation.

-OZ

Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH