

# Learning from others...

Yitro 5782/2022

Imagine how the Jewish people must have been feeling following the events of last week as they were miraculously saved from the pursuing Egyptians. Imagine how Moshe must have been feeling marching the Jews through the split sea and onto dry land, leading them in song. They must have felt on top of the world, like nothing could bring them down.

Then this week's Parasha opens, and we find the illustrious leader worn out and exasperated trying to solve small civil cases between people. Sitting all day in judgement, with the people surrounding him, haranguing him. In marches Yitro, Moshe's father-in-law, the Midian High Priest who according to midrash has been watching the Jewish people's trajectory since the time of Joseph. Now most visitors don't usually give frank advice the moment they come into your home, and generally most son in laws don't accept all advice given to them.

But Yitro is not most visitors, and Moshe not most son in laws. Yitro advises Moshe that if he carries on this way, he is going to be burnt out, and his position of leadership will crumble away. He advises Moshe to establish a hierarchical judicial system<sup>1</sup>. Moshe agrees.

One would think that the prophet of all prophets wouldn't need the advice of someone else to find success, and more so from the High Priest of Midian.

But sometimes it is the other that can give us the best advice, from a place of objectivity, and help us find the path to true success.

When Noach was saved from the flood God commands his descendants, the non-Jewish world, with seven commandments, one of which is to set up a judicial system<sup>2</sup>. While the Jews had been enslaved for centuries, Midian at least, but likely others, were operating in a society that established courts and had created localised judicial systems. Yitro brings experience and past knowledge.

The Rambam, in his laws about the courts, establishes that Jewish judges need to be wise beyond just Jewish law, they have to learn from the world, from sciences and mathematics, from astronomy to idolatry, all so that they are able to judge with real world context<sup>3</sup>.

Rav Michael Hattin asks how Moshe could have missed the need for this?<sup>4</sup> The answer lies in human nature to always think that what we are doing, what we know, is the best route. It takes the other to sometimes awaken us to the fact that things can, and should be different.

There is the powerful idea that we can always learn from other people, that even the most minority opinion, the most outside the box idea, or the idea stemming from the stranger<sup>5</sup>. These ideas, these opinions, they can change the course of history, they can be innovative, novel, and even revolutionary.

As Prikei Avot, the Ethics of our Fathers, says "who is wise? The one who learns from every person!"

All citations can be found in **A New Page of Talmud**