



## Yisro: Lowering and Lifting

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

*"It came about on the next day that Moses sat down to judge the people, and the people stood before Moses from the morning until the evening. When Moses' father-in-law saw what he was doing to the people, he said, "What is this thing that you are doing to the people? Why do you sit by yourself, while all the people stand before you from morning till evening?" Moses said to his father-in-law, "For the people come to me to seek God. If any of them has a case, he comes to me, and I judge between a man and his neighbor, and I make known the statutes of God and His teachings." Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing you are doing is not good. You will surely wear yourself out both you and these people who are with you for the matter is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. Now listen to me. I will advise you, and may the Lord be with you. [You] represent the people before God, and you shall bring the matters to God (Exodus 13-19)."*

A good father-in-law knows when to offer advice and when to support in silence. Yisro saw his son-in-law, the great Moshe Rabbeinu, struggling under the load of managing and adjudicating the daily affairs of his nation. He proceeded to make a simple suggestion – hire additional judges. It seems obvious enough; managing the judicial system of the Jewish nation was not a one-man job. So why did it take Yisro to convince Moshe of the need to make the change? Why didn't Moshe implement this system on his own?

The great tzaddik, Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev (1740-1810) frames the discussion between Yisro and Moshe in a dramatically different way. Yisro says to Moshe, *"my beloved son-in-law, you are so incredibly holy. You spoke to God on the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights; you have a direct line of communication, you are God's right hand – why are you involving yourself in the daily, petty affairs of ordinary people? If you spend your days with them and immerse yourself in the mundanity of their lives, you will spiritually regress. In your effort to help them, you will suffer a spiritual set-back."* Moshe responds, *"my beloved father-in-law, I truly appreciate your care and concern, but I think you have misunderstood. You see, when I spend my time with them, I am able to lift them up. It is not them who bring me down, but rather me who lifts them up."* This was the fundamental dispute between Yisro and Moshe. Should one leave the ivory tower of spirituality in order to effect change in others? Yisro felt – leave it to someone else to help the people with their ordinary, everyday problems. You have nothing to gain and everything to lose. Moshe knew he could appoint other judges, but in doing so, would lose out on the opportunity to influence and lift them up.

At the end of the day, Moshe listened to Yisro but not because he accepted Yisro's perspective. He adopted Yisro's advice as it was correct on a practical level. However, from the Jewish outlook and perspective, Moshe was and is unequivocally correct. It is tempting to remain closeted in the ivory tower of spirituality and holiness. It is alluring to want to focus one's spiritual energies on one's personal development. But it is our sacred task to have a positive impact on the people around us. It is our holy mission to share our spirituality with all of our brothers and sisters. It is our responsibility to lift others up by sometimes going down to meet them where they are. The fear of falling and failure when leaving our personal spiritual surroundings is understandable. But if we work on ourselves, invest in our learning, spiritual growth, and adherence and commitment to mitzvos, then when we go down to meet others, we will be successful in lifting them up.