

## **Shabbat Shalom with a Side of Torah – Yitro**

I have a collection of books with off the wall titles. My favorite book title is “Do Dead People Watch You Shower?” My next favorite is probably, “When Naked Hasidim Laugh.” I have metaphysical texts based in Star Trek, The Simpsons, The Matrix, and Winnie the Pooh (for which I also have texts in leadership). It was a “no brainer” when I saw “Moses on Management;” I had to have it.

While I enjoyed the book, I was troubled by the fact that the author gave Moses all the credit for his management expertise. In truth, the Torah depicts Moses as having great innate tools for the task, but early on, he was not much of a leader. It was not until his father-in-law, Yitro (Jethro) taught him how to lead that the world changed. Face it, God sent Moses on a quest to Egypt completely unprepared for the task at hand. Miraculous leprosy and snake charming really do not qualify – nor did they impress Pharaoh. Despite God’s promise of safety, Moses had to be a little naïve to believe that he would overcome Pharaoh armed with these two tricks. Not once during his encounters with Pharaoh did Moses ask him if Israel could go. There was no attempt to settle the matter and no negotiations took place. Moses simply walked in, made demands, and brought all sorts of plagues to throw at Egypt . And when Pharaoh finally did free Israel , it came with massive collateral damage, loss of livestock and the death of Egypt’s first born. Even as Israel finally marched to freedom, Moses still could not rally the Israelites to his cause. There were innumerable rebellions. At the shore of the sea, as the Egyptian army (recovering from the final plague) approached, trapping Israel between them and the sea, Moses simply stood on a rock asking God for help. Nakhshon took the reins of leadership and “dove in,” creating a new opportunity for salvation.

Moses was inspirational, though. He did, after all, manage to convince the people to follow him into the wilderness, and in the battle with the Amalekites, as long as his arms were held up in battle, the people would see him, giving them the strength to persevere. Then, as Israel approached the base of Sinai, the people even trusted Moses to go speak to God on their behalf. He had the charisma, but he was missing leadership skills; the ability to motivate people to personally invest themselves in the process of growing the spirit and security of the community. It was not until Yitro came to deliver Moses’ wife and sons (whom he had left home while on his quest), and sat him down to teach him, that Moses develops these skills.

While visiting there, Yitro watched as Moses worked himself to exhaustion. He sat to make all decisions, to hear all disputes, and to enact all legislation. Yitro took Moses aside and taught him the art of delegation and made him the leader exemplar. He taught Moses to appoint tribal leaders throughout the tribes to take on the role of leaders, judges, and legislators. There is a Hasidic teaching that this entire story is not really part of the necessary Torah. The word “Yitro” literally means addition. This story was added to the text, and brings with it a new dimension to the story as Moses begins a graduate degree program in leadership. Without this addition, Moses would not have become the inspiring leader upon whom the majority of the Torah is based.

Leadership is a learned trait; it is developed and nurtured, and taught. Lesson number one in a graduate leadership course deals with empowerment. Great leaders know when to lead and when to be lead.

Great leaders nurture other people to lead. Moses had numerous, wonderful teachers. His father-in-law taught him to empower people. In the Book of Numbers, the daughters of Zelophakhad will teach Moses about egalitarian rights. There are many who will make clear to him the laws regarding Shabbat, the artistry of the Tabernacle, and even of the trust necessary to be shared and understood between a leader and his constituency. All of Moses' training, though, begins with Yitro. Leaders are not born; they develop, and do so most effectively with teachers who challenge them to grow. It is our job to continue to teach our leaders; to voice our opinions and concerns, for when we fail to do so, they fail to be able to serve and take care of us. I have a bumper sticker, "Wait, I must catch up with them, for I am their leader." Leaders can only continue to be relevant when we help them to be relevant. If we want to succeed, we have to help our leadership to succeed, as well. Make your voice heard, stand up and be counted, and help lead your leaders to make better decisions on behalf of us all. Get involved. Shabbat Shalom.