

# Shabbat Table Topics – Parashat Yitro

## Moshe's Leadership

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In Chapter 18, [Ralbag](#) and [Abarbanel](#) debate the issue of Moshe's leadership skills: Ralbag writes that one of the purposes of our chapter is:

To let us know the intensity of Moshe's vigilance in cleaving to Hashem, to the extent that due to his deep vigilance, he would err in certain matters. As such, the Torah shares that Moshe, with his vast knowledge, did not turn his attention to determining the best way of judging the people until Yitro, his father-in-law directed him.

Abarbanel responds:

Many have already spoken much about this matter, against the master of prophets, suggesting that he was lacking in civic leadership... And this is a lie, for the perfection of his ways demonstrates his knowledge of them. And how could it be that Hashem did not teach him this basic wisdom and understanding?

With whom do you agree? Set up a debate at your Shabbat table, drawing on material from both Shemot 18 and other stories in Tanakh which relate to Moshe's leadership qualities. For more, see [Moshe and Yitro's advice](#).

## Moshe's Family Life

Leadership responsibilities often exact a heavy price, not just from the leader, but also from his/her spouse and children.

- Was Moshe justified in sending Zipporah and their children back to Midyan? Should he have sent for them immediately after the Exodus? See [Zipporah in Midyan](#).
- Did Moshe divorce Zipporah? See [achar shiluchehah](#).
- Were Zipporah and Moshe's sons present for the revelation at Sinai? See [Chronology](#).

## Interfaith Encounters

According to [R. D"Z Hoffmann](#) and [U. Cassuto](#), Yitro visited Moshe on a diplomatic mission, without any intention of converting. Other commentators disagree – see [Purpose of Yitro's Visit](#).

- Does this encounter teach about interactions with those of other faiths?
- How does one show respect to the other side without compromising one's own beliefs?

For other stories where Jews and Gentiles engage in friendly dialogue, see [Encounters with Foreign](#)

## Leaders.

## To Delegate or Not to Delegate

- Think of a case in which you were in a leadership position with many different tasks to accomplish. Did you delegate some of those responsibilities? Why or why not?
- Why might Moshe have been reluctant to delegate some of his responsibilities?  
See [Moshe and Yitro's advice](#).
- Which of Moshe's tasks does Yitro suggest he assign to others? Which does he suggest that Moshe retain for himself and why? See [Moshe's Duties and Yitro's Advice](#).

## Moshe and Intermarriage

According to most commentators, Yitro, "the *kohen* of Midyan," is Moshe's father-in-law (חותן).<sup>[1]</sup> Is it possible that Moshe married the daughter of an idolatrous priest?! Several questions merit consideration:

- Was Yitro an idolater when Moshe arrived in Midyan? What about Zipporah? See [Yitro's Religious Identity](#) and [כהן](#).
- Was there a prohibition against intermarriage before receiving the Torah or after receiving the Torah? See [Intermarriage](#).
- What were Moshe's own religious beliefs when he arrived in Midyan? If he grew up in Paroh's palace, to what extent did he know about and identify with the Jewish people? See [Moshe's Upbringing](#).

## Judicial Qualities

- What are the qualifications required to become a judge in your area of residence? How is Yitro's list of traits similar or different? How do you understand the differences? What does it tell you about the Torah's values and its view of judges? Was Moshe able to find people with all of these qualities? See [Advice and Implementation](#).
- Compare the appointment of judges in our story with the discussion of the appointment of R. Elazar B. Azariah as *Nasi* in Berakhot 27b. What traits do the Rabbis laud in R. Elazar b. Azariah? How do those compare with the traits listed in our chapter? How do the jobs of a judge and a *Nasi* compare? Why does each require the traits that it does? Do you agree with the qualifications listed in each story? Why do you think that wealth (see [אנשי חיל](#)) is the one trait that makes it to both lists?

## Divine Civil Law

One of the hallmarks of the Torah is that it incorporates both cultic and civil legislation. Not only are religious observances ordained by Hashem; secular law is as well. Was this always the plan? The [Akeidat Yitzchak](#) suggests that until Yitro's advice, Moshe did not realize that Hashem was planning on bequeathing a Divine code of civil law, and that Yitro was the first to conceive of this concept and recognize its desirability. For more, see [Did Moshe Need Yitro's Advice](#).

- Do you think it is possible that Yitro thought of this idea while Moshe himself had not? Why might such an idea have eluded Moshe?
  - What are the advantages of a Divine code of civil law? How does it compare to a system which has a separation of church and state?
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[1] For other possible interpretations of the word יתרו and understandings of how Yitro was related to Moshe, see [יתרו](#) and [Yitro's Names](#).