

All the Small Things

Teaching in the Middle School, I find myself trying, as I'm sure the parents do, to find the happy medium between micromanaging the students and their study habits (like requiring binders and study guides and giving extra time for projects) and letting the students manage their own time and studying schedule. If I micromanage, the students get the work done, but they also lose the responsibility for their own learning, homework and growth. If I let the students figure it out completely on their own, then I risk facing less than stellar quiz grades and assignments that are never turned in. It's the same situation in the office place. By micromanaging we can become bogged down by the nitty gritty, but at least we'll stay on top of the details. On the other hand, if we let the reigns go a little or delegate responsibility; we might find ourselves in a heap of trouble if something gets left behind. So we're faced with a challenge: how do we find our happy medium?

Moshe, the leader of the Israelites out from Egypt to the Promised Land, is also trying to learn this lesson. *Parshat Yitro*, our Torah portion for the week, introduces us to Moshe the workhorse, a workaholic who needs to be reacquainted with his family because he never sees them. While in this *parshah* Moshe receives the Ten Commandments, he also learns an important life lesson about management of a community. Since God called on Moshe, he has been the sole leader of the people, dealing with the problems, disputes and needs of the Israelites on his own. The text describes Moshe as the judge of the people, with the people standing in line from morning until evening until Moshe can help them solve their disputes. When Yitro, Moshe's father-in-law, asks Moshe what's going on, Moshe simply tells him that he's doing the job God asked him to do. Waiting in line all day long has become a way of life for the people because only Moshe can do the job of judge.

I imagine we all have moments where we think, "If you want something done right . . ." You feel that no one else knows the intricacies of the job like you do. When you're working on something close to your heart, you have a sense of ownership and protection over your work that does not allow you to think anyone else can do the job. But each time we take on a new task, that investment of time has to come from somewhere, whether it's another five minutes we could be spending with family or much needed time to rest. When we're in the thick of our work, we often lose sight of the big picture and need help regaining perspective.

Yitro witnesses Moshe approaching burnout, and he is concerned. In Chapter 18, verse 18, Yitro tells Moshe that he cannot do this alone; he will surely be ripped to shreds if he continues this way. Yitro then devises a plan for Moshe. Chapter 18, verses 19-26 contain the basic breakdown of a legal system. Most important in these words is Yitro's advice to Moshe, basically saying "Moshe, set judges for the people, they will handle all the small things, the day to day little problems, you, the leader, you handle the big stuff."

Moses learned that it's impossible to be all things to all people. Leadership isn't about always being the first to arrive and the last to go home. Rather, it's about recognizing and capitalizing on the strengths in a community of people. That's when the real work gets done.

ללמוד **To Learn:** ללמד **To Teach:** Parshat Yitro contains within it the 10 Commandments, and the description of the fire, lightning and thunder that was part of the event. Chapter 19 of the book of Shemot reminds us that it is necessary to use our senses in order to be fully present in experiences. Read through chapter 19 together as a family and put yourself in the shoes of the Israelites at the mountain. As a family discuss how you feel? What you expect? What does this tell you about the importance of these *mitzvot*.

לשמור **To Keep:** לעשות **To Do:** As a family, take a look at the 10 Commandments and discuss how each commandment can be kept and honored in your lives. Looking at the basic ideas presented in each commandment, come up with your own tablets and rules to live by that will help lead you to truly understand and embrace these 10 *mitzvot*.

And God said all of these things saying:
I am God, your God that brought you out from the land of Egypt from the house of slavery. You should not have other Gods before me.
You should not make for yourself idols or images that are in the sky above or the earth below or in the water below the land. You will not bow down to them or worship them because I, God your God is a jealous God and remember the sins of the fathers on the children for 3rd and 4th generations of those who hate me. And I will do good to the 1000th generation of those who love me and guard my mitzvot.
you will not lift up the name of God, your God in a lie because God will not forgive those who use God's name as a lie.
Remember the Shabbat day for it is holy. 6 days you will work and do all of your work. On the seventh day it is Shabbat for God your God, you will not do all work; you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant or your animal or the stranger that is in your gates. Because in 6 days God made the sky and the land, the sea and all that is in them and he rested on the 7th day therefore God blessed day 7 and made it holy.
Honor your father and your mother so that your days will be lengthened on the land that God gave to you.
You will not murder
You will not commit adultery
You will not steal
You will not give false testimony about your neighbor.
You will not covet the house of your friend, you will not covet the wife of your friend or his male servant or female servant, or his donkey or anything that belongs to your friend.