

Table Talk: Yitro

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The philosopher and basketball coach Bobby Knight once said that if you listen to the advice of the guys shouting from the grandstand, pretty soon you'll be sitting with them.

It's true. There's a lot of free advice out there, and most of it is bad. Accept at your own peril. But does that mean, as Coach Knight suggests, that it's safe not to listen at all?

In *parashat Yitro* this week, Moses is talking to Jethro, telling him how busy he's been freeing the slaves, parting the Red Sea, leading his people to the mountain where they will meet God... you know, *that* stuff. But Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, isn't impressed. In fact, he sounds like he's angry. He tells Moses he's been working too hard, and as a result he's been ignoring his wife and children.

"The thing you are doing is not right," Jethro says. "You will surely wear yourself out, and these people as well."

Moses might have ignored the advice, or told Jethro to mind his own business, or even thrown a chair in anger. Instead, he did exactly what Jethro recommended. He delegated work, appointed judges to help settle disputes among his people, and booked a family vacation to Club Med so everyone could recharge and reconnect.

Jethro, of course, is no drunken fan shouting from the cheap seats. He's a "priest of Midian," – which means he might know something about leadership, and a trusted member of Moses' family. Still, Moses needed humility and wisdom to accept his father-in-law's advice. As you and your family gather for Shabbat dinner this week, try asking these questions about advice.

1. What's the best and worst advice you ever got? What is the best advice you DIDN'T take?
2. Are you more likely to take advice from relatives than you are from friends or work colleagues? If so, why?
3. In a way, Jethro's advice to Moses seems to have nothing to do with religion. He's saying Moses is overworked. In what way is this a spiritual or religious insight?
4. After getting advice from Jethro and establishing a judicial system among the Israelites, Moses goes to Mt. Sinai to receive God's commandments. What does one have to do with the other?

Shabbat Shalom!



Table Talk

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