

YITRO: TAKING ADVICE AND DELEGATING

Rabbi Michael Rosensweig asserts that the torah has advice about things that are not moral issues. Here may be an example. What is the torah's attitude toward taking advice and delegating? Our parasha seems to suggest that both are good. Yitro advises Moshe to delegate and he does. What does the torah say about these matters?

Taking Advice

Did Moshe take advice from Jethro, Yitro?

עֲתָה שָׁמַע בְּקוֹלִי אִיעָצְךָ וְיְהִי אֱלֹקִים עִמָּךְ הֲיִה אֲתָה לָעַם מִוִּלְ הָאֱלֹקִים וְהִבֵּאתָ אֹתָהּ אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים אֶל־הָאֱלֹקִים:

Now listen to me. I will give you counsel, and God be with you! You represent the people before God: you bring the disputes before God,

Rashi

איעצך ויהי אלקים עמך. בעצה; אמר לו צא המלך בגבורה (מכילתא):

I WILL GIVE THEE COUNSEL BUT LET GOD BE WITH THEE in considering this counsel.

This is really what he said to him: Go and consult with the Almighty as regards the counsel I give you (Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael 18:19).

Ramban

See the end of Yitro's advice

אם את־הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה תַעֲשֶׂה וְצִוְךָ אֱלֹקִים וְיִכְלַת עִמָּךְ וְגַם כָּל־הָעַם הַזֶּה עַל־מְקוֹמוֹ יָבֹא בְשָׁלוֹם:

If you do this—and God so commands you—you will be able to bear up; and all these people too will go home unwearied.”

Avot 4, 1

בן זומא אומר, איזהו חכם, הלומד מכל אדם, שנאמר (תהלים קיט) מכל מלמד השכלתי כי עדותיך שיחה לי. איזהו גבור, הכובש את יצרו, שנאמר (משלי טז) טוב ארך אפים מגבור ומשל ברוחו מלכד עיר. איזהו עשיר, השמח בחלקו, שנאמר (תהלים קכח) יגיע כפיה כי תאכל אשריה וטוב לה. אשריה, בעולם הזה. וטוב לה, לעולם הבא. איזהו מכבד, המכבד את הבריות, שנאמר (שמואל א ב) כי מכבדי אכבד ובזי יקלו:

Ben Zoma said: Who is wise? He who learns from every man, as it is said: “From all who taught me have I gained understanding” (Psalms 119:99).

Bava Metzia 59a

ואמר רב כל ההולך בעצת אשתו נופל בגיהנם שנאמר (מלכים א כא, כה) רק לא היה כאחאב וגו' א"ל רב פפא לאביי והא אמרי אינשי איתתך גוצא גחין ותלחוש לה לא קשיא הא במילי דעלמא והא במילי דביתא לישנא אחרינא הא במילי דשמיא והא במילי דעלמא

And Rav says: Nevertheless, **anyone who follows the counsel of his wife descends into Gehenna, as it is stated: “But there was none like Ahab, who did give himself over to do that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife incited”** (I Kings 21:25). **Rav Pappa said to Abaye: But don't people say** a popular proverb: **If your wife is short, stoop and whisper to her** and consult with her? The Gemara answers: This is **not difficult**, as **this** statement of Rav instructs that one not follow her counsel **in general matters; and that** proverb instructs that one follow her counsel **in household matters**. The Gemara presents **another version** of this distinction: **This** statement of Rav maintains that one should not follow her counsel **in divine matters; and that** proverb maintains that one should follow her counsel **in general matters**.

Berachot 4a

ואידך, כה אמר דוד לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא: רבונא של עולם, לא חסיד אני? שכל מלכי מזרח ומערב יושבים אגודות אגודות בכבודם, ואני ידי מלוכלכות בדם ובשפיר ובשליא כדי לטהר אשה לבעלה. ולא עוד, אלא כל מה שאני עושה, אני נמלק במפיבשת רבי, ואומר לו: "מפיבשת רבי, יפה דנתתי? יפה חייבתתי? יפה זכיתתי? יפה טהרתתי? יפה טמאתתי?", ולא בושתי.

And the other Sage said: David said the following before the Holy One, Blessed be He: Master of the Universe, am I not pious? For all of the kings of the East and the West sit in groups befitting **their honored** status, but I sit as a judge who issues rulings for the people. Women come with questions of ritual impurity and **my hands become soiled with their blood** as I labor to determine whether or not it is blood of impurity and she has menstruating woman status, **and with a fetus that miscarried** at a stage of development before it was clear whether or not it is considered a birth, **and with placenta**, which women sometimes discharge unrelated to the birth of a child (see Leviticus 15:19–30 with regard to blood, and 12:1–8 with regard to miscarriage and placenta). King David went to all this trouble **in order to render a woman ritually pure** and consequently permitted **to her husband**. If, after examination, a Sage declares the woman ritually pure, she is permitted to be with her husband, which leads to increased love and affection, and ultimately to procreation (Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto). **And not only** do I engage in activity considered to be beneath the station of a king, **but I consult my teacher, Mefivoshet**, son of King Saul's son, Jonathan, with regard to **everything that I do**. I say to him: **Mefivoshet, my teacher, did I decide properly? Did I convict properly? Did I acquit properly? Did I rule ritually pure properly?**

Did I rule ritually impure properly? And I was not embarrassed. Forgoing royal dignity should make me worthy to be called pious.

אָמַר רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻעַ בְּרִיהַ דְּרַב אִידִי: מַאי קָרָא — “וְאִדְבַּרְהָ בְּעֵדוּתֶיךָ נֶגֶד מְלָכִים וְלֹא אֲבוֹשׁ”

Rav Yehoshua, son of Rav Idi, said: What verse alludes to this? “And I speak Your testimonies before kings and I will not be ashamed” (Psalms 119:46). This verse alludes both to David’s commitment to Torah, in contrast to the kings of the East and the West, as well as to the fact that he was not ashamed to discuss matters of Torah with Mefivoshet, a descendant of kings. David was not afraid to have his mistakes corrected by Mefivoshet.

Berachot 27b 28a

They decided to appoint Rabbi Elazar b. Azarya to lead the Sanhedrin, so...

אָתוּ וְאָמְרוּ לִיה: נִיחָא לִיה לְמָר דְּלִיהוּי רִישׁ מְתִיבְתָא? אָמַר לְהוּ: אִיזִיל וְאִימְלִיךָ בְּאִינְשֵׁי בֵיתִי. אָזַל וְאִמְלִיךָ בְּדַבְּיָתָהּ. אָמְרָה לִיה:

They came and said to him: Would the Master consent to being the Head of the Yeshiva? He said to them: I will go and consult with my household. He went and consulted with his wife. She said to him:

דְּלָמָא מְעַבְרִין לָךְ. אָמַר לְה: לְשִׁתְּמַשׁ אִינְשׁ יוֹמָא חָדָא בְּכֶסֶף דְּמוֹקְרָא, וְלִמְחַר לִיתְבַּר. אָמְרָה לִיה: לִית לָךְ חִיּוּרְתָא. הָהוּא יוֹמָא בְּרַ תְּמַנִּי סְרִי שְׁנֵי הָהּ, אֶתְרַחֵשׁ לִיה נִסָּא וְאֶהְדְּרוּ לִיה תְּמַנִּי סְרִי דְרִי חִיּוּרְתָא. הֵיִינוּ דְקָאִמַר רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן עֲזַרְיָה: הָרִי אֲנִי כְּבֵן שְׁבַעִים שָׁנָה. וְלֹא “בֶּן שְׁבַעִים שָׁנָה”

There is room for concern. Perhaps they will remove you from office just as they removed Rabban Gamliel. He said to her, based on the folk saying: Let a person use an expensive goblet one day and let it break tomorrow. In other words, one should take advantage of an opportunity that presents itself and he need not concern himself whether or not it will last. She said to him: You have no white hair, and it is inappropriate for one so young to head the Sages. The Gemara relates: That day, he was eighteen years old, a miracle transpired for him and eighteen rows of hair turned white. The Gemara comments: That explains that which Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya said: I am as one who is seventy years old and he did not say: I am seventy years old, because he looked older than he actually was.

Delegating

Avot 2, 16

רבי טרפון אומר היום קצר והמלאכה מרובה והפועלים עצלים והשכר הרבה ובעל הבית דוחק

Rabbi Tarfon said: the day is short, and the work is plentiful, and the laborers are indolent, and the reward is great, and the master of the house is insistent.

הוא היה אומר לא עליך המלאכה לגמור. ולא אתה בן חורין ליבטל ממנה. אם למדת תורה הרבה נותנים לך שכר הרבה. ונאמן הוא בעל מלאכתך שישלם לך שכר פעולתך. ודע מתן שכרן של צדיקים לעתיד לבא

He [Rabbi Tarfon] used to say: It is not your duty to finish the work, but neither are you at liberty to neglect it; If you have studied much Torah, you shall be given much reward. Faithful is your employer to pay you the reward of your labor; And know that the grant of reward unto the righteous is in the age to come.

The Vilna Gaon connected the mishnah above with this Midrash:

Yalkut Ekev

ד"א אנכי מצוה אתכם היום שלא תאמר איני יכול לשמוע את כל התורה ולשמור את כל המצוות שכתוב בה ארוכה מארץ מדה, משל למלך שהיה לו בור עמוק לאין סוף אמר לבן ביתו שכור פועלים ומלא את הבור, שכר פועלים ומי שהיה טפש היה הולך ומביט בבור אמר אימתי אני ממלא אותו, ומי היה פקח אומר מה איכפת לי שכיר יום אני אני שמח שמצאתי לי מלאכה, כך הקב"ה אומר לו מה איכפת לך שכיר יום אתה עשה יומך עד ירצה כשכיר יומו.

Which I command you today, so that you should not say, I cannot learn the whole torah and keep all the mitzvot for it is as long as the earth. It is compared to a king who had a big deep hole to fill he told his people to hire workers to fill the hole. He hired workers, the fools would look and say, when can this be filled? And the clever ones said, what do I care, I am an hourly worker. I am glad I found work. So the Holy One blessed be He said to him, what do you care, you are a day worker. Do your day's work...

Rabbeinu Bahyay, Behaalotecha

ואצלתי - משה רבינו ע"ה נתעלה באותה עצה להדמות לדמות קונו המאציל על שבעים שרים של מעלה, שהם בית דינו.

I will take some of the spirit on you and place it on the 70 elders- Moshe was elevated at that time to be similar to his Maker, who delegates and gives of himself to the 70 officers in the heavenly court...

