

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Yitro
February 7, 2026 *** 20 Shevat, 5786

Yitro in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/36271/jewish/Yitro-in-a-Nutshell.htm

The name of the Parshah, "Yitro," means "Jethro" and it is found in Exodus 18:1.

Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, hears of the great miracles which G-d performed for the people of Israel, and comes from Midian to the Israelite camp, bringing with him Moses' wife and two sons. Jethro advises Moses to appoint a hierarchy of magistrates and judges to assist him in the task of governing and administering justice to the people.

The children of Israel camp opposite Mount Sinai, where they are told that G-d has chosen them to be His "kingdom of priests" and "holy nation." The people respond by proclaiming, "All that G-d has spoken, we shall do."

On the sixth day of the third month (Sivan), seven weeks after the Exodus, the entire nation of Israel assembles at the foot of Mount Sinai for the Giving of the Torah. G-d descends on the mountain amidst thunder, lightning, billows of smoke and the blast of the shofar, and summons Moses to ascend.

G-d proclaims the Ten Commandments, commanding the people of Israel to believe in G-d, not to worship idols or take G-d's name in vain, to keep the Shabbat, honor their parents, not to murder, not to commit adultery, not to steal, and not to bear false witness or covet another's property. The people cry

out to Moses that the revelation is too intense for them to bear, begging him to receive the Torah from G-d and convey it to them.

Haftarah in a Nutshell: Isaiah 6:1-13

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/472350/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This week's haftarah discusses Isaiah's vision of the Heavenly Chariot (the merkavah), a revelation that was experienced by all the Israelites when G-d spoke the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai—an event recounted in this week's Torah reading.

Isaiah perceives G-d sitting on a throne surrounded by angels. Isaiah vividly describes the angels and their behavior (in anthropomorphic terms). During the course of this vision, Isaiah volunteers to be G-d's emissary to transmit His message to the Israelites. He is immediately given a depressing prophecy regarding the exile the nation will suffer as punishment for their many sins—and the Land of Israel will be left empty and desolate, though there will be left a “trunk” of the Jewish people that eventually will regrow.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The Politics of Revelation by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z”l (5767)

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/yitro/politics-of-revelation/>

The revelation at Mount Sinai – the central episode not only of the parsha of Yitro, but of Judaism as a whole – was unique in the religious history of humankind. Other faiths (Christianity

and Islam) have claimed to be religions of revelation, but in both cases the revelation of which they spoke was to an individual (“the son of God”, “the prophet of God”). Only in Judaism was God’s self-disclosure not to an individual (a prophet) or a group (the elders) but to an entire nation, young and old, men, women and children, the righteous and not yet righteous alike.

From the very outset, the people of Israel knew something unprecedented had happened at Sinai. As Moses put it, forty years later:

For ask now about earliest times, times long before your own, from the day God created humans on the earth; ask from one end of heaven to the other: Has anything as great as this ever happened before? Has anyone heard of anything like this? Has any people ever heard the Voice of God speaking out of fire, as you have, and lived?... To you this was shown – so that you may know that the Lord is God; besides Him, there is no other. From heaven He let you hear His Voice...

Deut. 4:32-35

For the great Jewish thinkers of the Middle Ages, the significance was primarily epistemological. It created certainty and removed doubt. The authenticity of a revelation experienced by one person could be questioned. One witnessed by millions could not. God disclosed His presence in public to remove any possible suspicion that the presence felt, and the voice heard, were not genuine.

Looking however at the history of humankind since those days, it is clear that there was another significance also – one that had to do not with religious knowledge but with politics. At Sinai a new kind of nation was being formed and a new kind of

society – one that would be an antithesis of Egypt in which the few had power and the many were enslaved. At Sinai, the children of Israel ceased to be a group of individuals and became, for the first time, a body politic: a nation of citizens under the sovereignty of God whose written constitution was the Torah and whose mission was to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

Even today, standard works on the history of political thought trace it back, through Marx, Rousseau, and Hobbes to Plato’s Republic, Aristotle’s Politics and the Greek city state (Athens in particular) of the fourth century BCE. This is a serious error. To be sure, words like “democracy” (rule by the people) are Greek in origin. The Greeks were gifted at abstract nouns and systematic thought. However, if we look at the “birth of the modern” – at figures like Milton, Hobbes, and Locke in England, and the founding fathers of America – the book with which they were in dialogue was not Plato or Aristotle but the Hebrew Bible. Hobbes quotes it 657 times in *The Leviathan* alone. Long before the Greek philosophers, and far more profoundly, at Mount Sinai the concept of a free society was born.

Three things about that moment were to prove crucial. The first is that long before Israel entered the land and acquired their own system of government (first by judges, later by kings), they had entered into an overarching covenant with God. That covenant (Brit Sinai) set moral limits to the exercise of power. The code we call Torah established for the first time the primacy of right over might. Any king who behaved contrarily to Torah was acting *ultra vires*, and could be challenged. This is the single most important fact about biblical politics.

Democracy on the Greek model always had one fatal weakness. Alexis de Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill called it “the tyranny of the majority”. J. L. Talmon called it “totalitarian democracy.” The rule of the majority contains no guarantee of the rights of minorities. As Lord Acton rightly noted, it was this that led to the downfall of Athens: “There was no law superior to that of the state. The lawgiver was above the law.” In Judaism, by contrast, prophets were mandated to challenge the authority of the king if he acted against the terms of the Torah. Individuals were empowered to disobey illegal or immoral orders. For this alone, the covenant at Sinai deserves to be seen as the single greatest step in the long road to a free society.

The second key element lies in the prologue to the covenant. God tells Moses:

“This is what you shall say to the House of Jacob, what you shall tell the people of Israel: ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians: how I lifted you up on eagles’ wings and brought you to Me. Now, if you faithfully heed My voice and keep My covenant, you will be My treasure among all the peoples, although the whole earth is Mine. A kingdom of priests and a holy nation you shall be to Me.’ These are the words you must speak to the Israelites.” Ex. 19:3-6

Moses tells this to the people, who reply:

“We will do everything the Lord has said.” Ex. 19:8

What is the significance of this exchange? It means that until the people had signified their consent, the revelation could not proceed. There is no legitimate government without the consent of the governed, even if the governor is Creator of

heaven and earth. I know of few more radical ideas anywhere. To be sure, there were Sages in the Talmudic period who questioned whether the acceptance of the covenant at Sinai was completely free. However, at the heart of Judaism is the idea – way ahead of its time, and not always fully realised – that the free God desires the free worship of free human beings. God, said the rabbis, does not act tyrannically with His creatures.

The third, equally ahead of its time, was that the partners to the covenant were to be “all the people” – men, women and children. This fact is emphasised later on in the Torah in the mitzva of Hakhel, the septennial covenant renewal ceremony. The Torah states specifically that the entire people is to be gathered together for this ceremony, “men, women and children.” A thousand years later, when Athens experimented with democracy, only a limited section of society had political rights. Women, children, slaves, and foreigners were excluded. In Britain, women did not get the vote until the twentieth century. According to the sages, when God was about to give the Torah at Sinai, He told Moses to consult first with the women and only then with the men (“this is what you shall you say to the House of Jacob” – this means, the women). The Torah, Israel’s “constitution of liberty”, includes everyone. It is the first moment, by thousands of years, that citizenship is conceived as being universal.

There is much else to be said about the political theory of the Torah (see my *The Politics of Hope*, *The Dignity of Difference*, and *The Jonathan Sacks Haggada* as well as the important works by Daniel Elazar and Michael Walzer). But one thing is clear: With the revelation at Sinai something unprecedented entered the human horizon. It would take centuries, millennia, before its full implications were understood. Abraham Lincoln

said it best when he spoke of “a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.” At Sinai, the politics of freedom was born.

[On Moses' “Saying” and “Telling” by Alan Cooper](https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/on-moses-saying-and-telling/)
<https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/on-moses-saying-and-telling/>

The highlight of Parashat Yitro is undoubtedly the spectacular son et lumière at Sinai, accompanying the uniquely unmediated revelation of God’s “words” (the 10 Commandments) directly to the people. The gravity of the occasion demanded special preparation, and most of Exodus 19 is devoted to that preparation, beginning with God summoning Moses and instructing him (verse 3):

Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, And tell the children of Israel. כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבֵית יִעֲקֹב וְתִגִּיד לְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

It seems at first glance that God is issuing the same instruction twice. In the first version of his Torah commentary, Abraham Ibn Ezra disparages commentators who differentiate between the two utterances, concluding, “It is as if they had never seen the words of the prophets who speak in doublets (כפל, viz., poetic parallelism) to fix the words in the mind. And it is the way of elegant expression (צחות).” Similarly, Samuel David Luzzatto (Shadal) states that the doubling is to set “this word, the introduction to the entire Torah,” firmly in the mind. Most modern scholars would agree that the doubling is both emphatic and stylish (poetic).

But that way of interpreting does not comport well with the traditional rabbinic mindset. The rabbinic view is that Scripture is economical, which means that there can be no redundancy or synonymy, certainly not for the sake of mere “elegance.”

The burden on the interpreter is to determine the distinctive connotations of the terms that designate Moses' speech act(s) and audience(s), respectively. Thus the earliest midrashic interpretation, in Mekhilta Bahodesh, chapter 2:

“Thus shall you say”: “thus”—in the holy tongue.

“Thus”—in this order. “Thus”—on this matter. “Thus”—that you neither diminish nor augment.

“Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob”—the women; “and tell the children of Israel”—the men.

“Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob”—gently.

“Say”—give the women the basic ideas. “And tell the children of Israel”—be specific in speaking to the men.

According to the Midrash, the word “thus” connotes precision in the choice of language (Hebrew), the order of presentation, and the subject matter. “Speaking” is gentle, while “telling” is punctilious. Most provocatively, the women (“house of Jacob”) are addressed gently (בלשון רכה) with generalities, while the specifics are conveyed to the men (“house of Israel”).

Rashi adapts and condenses the Mekhilta interpretation, adding (from Shabbat 87a) that the men are to be “told” about “punishments and details, words as tough as sinews [or, as harsh as poison].” The latter comment is based on a word play between the term for telling (תגיד) and the word that means either sinews or poison (גידין).

Why would anyone think that “house of Jacob” refers to women in the first place? The starting point is a rabbinic comment in Berakhot 13a: ישראל עיקר ויעקב טפל לו, “[The name] Israel is primary and Jacob is inferior to it.” This comment is a reflection on the fact that even after God

changes Jacob's name to Israel, the seemingly superseded name continues to appear in the text. Why so? To allow for different connotations of the respective names.

Correlating the Talmudic statement about the two names with the association of the "inferior" name with women leads to blatantly misogynistic interpretations such as this one by Joseph ibn Aqnin, translated from Arabic and quoted by Baḥya ben Asher in his commentary on Genesis 32:30:[1]

Know that the name Jacob connotes lowliness, derived from "his hand was holding onto the heel of Esau" (Gen. 25:26), for the heel is the lowest part of the body. The name Israel, however, connotes authority and high stature.... That is the sense of "The Lord said to him, your name shall be Israel," as the sages said, "Israel is primary and Jacob is inferior to it." And Scripture goes on to state, "Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob and tell the children of Israel," relating women to Jacob because they are inferior to men, and relating males to Israel because they are primary.

In his commentary on Exodus 19:3, Baḥya elaborates, stating that God commanded Moses to speak "calmly" (בנחת) to the women first, "to teach them discipline and proper conduct and, moreover, so that they might direct a son towards the study of Torah and observance of the commandments." Moses is instructed to give the women only the "chapter headings" (generalities) "because their minds are not as settled as men's."

Some later commentators retain the midrashic sensibility while diminishing or eliminating the misogyny implicit in the midrash and spelled out in Baḥya's interpretation. Ḥayyim ibn Attar does so explicitly, commenting:

It is necessary to explain the doubling of you shall say // you shall tell. Our rabbis said “house of Jacob” refers to women, to whom Moses would speak soothingly, and “to the house of Israel” he would declare words as tough as sinews. But the difficulty is that we do not find that God’s words conveyed two different messages, but a single expression for men and women alike, whether tough or soothing.... Also, I see no “tough words” in God’s words to the men, but words that revive the soul!

Following that assertion, Ibn Attar launches into a lengthy excursus on the rewards that people receive for observing the commandments, arguing that two verses in Deuteronomy (7:9 and 20:6, respectively) prove that the reward for observance out of love is twice as great as that for observance out of fear. When God reveals the words of Torah, then, there are two possible ways to present them:

One way is to speak loving and tender words, with the positive outcome that [people] will receive the Torah out of love, and double their reward.... The second way is to speak tough words, like a king who decrees to his subjects with threats, with the positive outcome that they will not accidentally disregard a single commandment, although they will be entitled to only half the reward that they would get for doing them out of love.

In Ibn Attar’s interpretation, God wisely commanded in both ways, by way of love and by inducing fear. “Saying” connotes love and tenderness while “telling” induces fear and reverence. Both are good and necessary for the fulfillment of the Torah: “Every Jew must acquire both love and reverence,

and God's words entail both. As for the words of our rabbis, who said these are the women and those are the men, they are by way of homily." Overt (albeit polite) rejection of the rabbinic gender distinction yields a more palatable midrashic-style interpretation for the modern reader.

Malbim, who also is neo-rabbinic in his avoidance of textual redundancy or superfluity, is another commentator who sets gender aside. First, he asserts the difference between "saying" and "telling": "Telling entails something novel and difficult that is made known by the teller; it is a matter outside the hearer's knowledge. Saying includes any oral utterance." Then, he renders the rabbinic notion of Jacob as inferior to Israel as a class distinction: ordinary descendants of Jacob "are called by the name 'Jacob,' and the elite of the nation or the people, those of high stature, are called by the name 'Israel.'" The common people are to be instructed with "simple and easy words," in contrast to "the elite and the elders," who are to be addressed with "new and great words."

In the minds of our commentators, God's double charge to Moses carries diverse messages about how Moses should prepare the Jews for revelation at Sinai: (1) by conveying God's instructions precisely for memorability; (2) by addressing the women in one way, and the men in another; (3) by commanding both lovingly and threateningly; (4) by speaking to the masses in one way and to the elite in another. In every case, the interpretive decisions reveal as much or more about the interpreters as they do about the biblical text—about their prejudices and preoccupations, and about the circumstances of their lives. They provide endless fascination—and possibilities of meaning—for students of Torah. (*Alan Cooper is the Elaine Rabich Professor of Jewish Studies Emeritus at JTS*) [1] See Abraham Lipshitz, *Studies on R. Bahya ben Asher ibn*

Halawa's Commentary on the Torah (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 2000), pp. 78-80.

Yitro: From Hierarchical Leadership to Democracy by Chana Borow (2024)

https://3c9c5fef-8db2-4f96-9dfb-feffaf25670e.filesusr.com/ugd/05f702_5d6c03b296e8428186d959f4f720b682.pdf

In this week's parsha, Parshat Yitro, we see an astonishing act of leadership and humility from Moshe Rabeinu—one that would impact how we think about leadership for all time to come. We see Moshe Rabeinu, already a great leader, recognize, with the help of Yitro, that he needs to take a step back and delegate for his own well-being and the well-being of Bnei Yisrael. Moshe was able to recognize that Yitro, his father-in-law and a priest of Midian, had many more years of leadership experience under his belt. Yitro had been in Moshe's shoes before, a man with limited time and capacity, called upon to solve seemingly endless dilemmas. Moshe is able to recognize his caring father-in-law for the leader that he was and to really learn from this elder, even though he emerged from a very different community. This willingness to learn from a leader who comes from a world apart is remarkable. Moshe approaches Yitro with the utmost respect: Moses went out to meet his father-in-law; he bowed low and kissed him; each asked after the other's welfare, and they went into the tent (Shemot 18:7). Even though Moshe is the most powerful and well-respected person in Bnei Yisrael, he takes the time out of his day to go out and meet Yitro. He does so with bows and kisses, demonstrating humility, trust, and love. Moshe goes one step further, showing an acceptance of

Yitro and his culture: And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices for God; and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to partake of the meal before God with Moses' father-in-law (Shemot 18:12). Moshe not only shows Yitro an immense amount of respect, but he also shares in Yitro's religious practices. While Moshe is not specifically mentioned in this verse, the Ibn Ezra explains that this all took place in Moshe's tent and therefore the Torah does not need to add Moshe to the verse. Yitro, a priest of another nation, gave a korban, a sacrifice, to God. According to Ibn Ezra, "for God" tells us that this is a sacrifice to Hashem, to affirm Hashem as the one true God and to thank Him. It is not obvious that Moshe and Aaron would be okay with accepting a sacrifice from someone who used to be the priest of another nation, a nation that worshiped other gods. But Moshe realizes that Yitro's past can be an asset to him:

But when Moses' father-in-law saw how much he had to do for the people, he said, "What is this thing that you are doing to the people? Why do you act alone, while all the people stand about you from morning until evening?" Moses replied to his father-in-law, "It is because the people come to me to inquire of God. When they have a dispute, it comes before me, and I decide between one party and another, and I make known the laws and teachings of God." But Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing you are doing is not right; you will surely wear yourself out, and these people as well. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. Now listen to me. I will give you counsel, and God be with you! ... Set these over them as chiefs of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens, and let them judge the people at all times. Have them bring every major dispute to you, but let them decide every minor dispute themselves. Make it easier for yourself by letting them share

the burden with you... Moses heeded his father-in-law and did just as he had said (Shemot 18:14-19, 22, 24). Here we see Moshe Rabeinu, the quintessential Jewish leader, recognize how much he can learn from a leader of a different nation. Moshe was able to continue on as a strong leader because of the skills in delegation that he learned from Yitro. Sometimes, as a leader, it seems easier to just do everything by yourself. It's easy to believe that this is the only way to get things done correctly. Yitro here is thus holding Moshe's hand through this process of giving up some control, helping him make space for others and their imperfections. Moshe was used to a hierarchical style of leadership. He grew up with Pharaoh as his primary role model, a man who ruled with an iron fist and did not relinquish control for anything. Yitro comes in and shows Moshe that there is a different way. There is a more democratic way that is not only better for the leader, but also better for the community as a whole. Yitro helped Moshe bring a nation of slaves into a system of democracy. A system where everyone's voice is heard and matters. A system which ultimately allowed Bnei Yisrael to thrive. We can learn a lot from Moshe's receptivity here. When leaders from different nations, different traditions, different religions come together, we get a richer understanding of the world around us and our own communities. Especially in hard times, when it is so easy to be divided and to stay siloed in our own bubbles, we need to push ourselves to be more like Moshe Rabeinu. To see humanity and wisdom in sources outside of ourselves so that we, and our wider worlds, can thrive. *(Chana Borow is a rabbinical student at Yeshivat Maharat. With a Master's in Jewish Education and a BA in History, she currently serves as a Pulpit Intern at Anshe Sholom B'nai Israel in Chicago and Program Assistant at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale. Her experience includes teaching Middle School and High School Tanakh, Talmud and Jewish history at*

multiple institutions including the Abraham Joshua Heschel School. Chana specializes in making traditional Jewish texts accessible while fostering inclusive community spaces.)

[Yitro: Human to Human – The Most Important Lesson by the Accidental Talmudist](https://www.accidentaltalmudist.org/torah/2024/01/30/yitro-human-to-human-2/)

<https://www.accidentaltalmudist.org/torah/2024/01/30/yitro-human-to-human-2/>

The Ten Commandments were given by God to Moses on two tablets. The first tablet consisted of laws between man and God, such as belief in God and observing Shabbat. The second tablet contained laws between man and man, such as don't murder, don't covet. The Mabit (Rabbi Moshe ben Yosef Di Trani, 1500-1580) points out that on the tablets, the laws between man and man were inscribed using fewer words and a larger font than the laws between man and God. This is to emphasize the central importance of the laws between man and man. To merit receiving the Holy Torah, we must first treat others with kindness and respect.

Rabbi Chaim Vital (1543-1620) used this concept to explain why the Book of Genesis comes before the Book of Exodus. Genesis is filled with lessons on the proper way to treat others, which we must learn before we reach the Book of Exodus and the giving of the Torah. Similarly, Torah portion Yitro starts with a depiction of the “shalom bayit” (peace in the home) of Moses' family, then continues with Yitro helping Moses set up a justice system to ensure fairness to all. Only after making peace in the family and the community are the Jewish people ready to receive the Torah from God.

(Salvator Litvak finished reading the entire Talmud in 2012 after participating in the 7.5 year Daf Yomi cycle. Wanting to share the

wisdom he learned, Litvak started a blog and a Facebook page called *Accidental Talmudist*. Together with his wife Nina, Litvak shares Jewish wisdom, faith, culture, history and music with over a million followers.)

Table for Five: Yitro

Edited by Nina and Salvador Litvak, the Accidental Talmudist

“You shall seek out capable people who fear God, people of truth who despise gain.” – Exodus 18:21

Rabbi Shlomo Seidenfeld: Aish Scholar in Residence, Freelance Rabbi

Our verse is both fascinating and perplexing. Yitro either remained a non-Jewish priest or became a convert (both opinions are offered). Nevertheless, he authoritatively and boldly offered leadership advice to Moshe, the man G-d chose to confront Pharaoh and lead the Jewish people towards their ultimate mission. In our verse he implores Moshe in regards to what qualities to seek out in Jewish leaders/judges. Each of the qualities in and of themselves appear to be self-evident and collectively weave together to describe individuals impervious to being corrupted by gain and ulterior motives.

Of all the qualities that Yitro delineates, the characterization, he who “**despises gain**”, seems the most redundant. After all, what does it add to the other qualities that Yitro enunciated? Why wasn't it sufficient to simply list “G-d Fearing and Seeker of Truth” etc.

So here's a quick story. A Rabbi was once walking through Manhattan and noticed that multiple high-rises had a particular family name on them. He turned to the young man accompanying him and said “that man wasn't hugged enough

as a kid”. He opined that the deep need of this builder to billboard his success, his “gain”, was actually rooted in insecurity and a desperate need for validation. Yitro’s advice to Moshe discerned a crucial insight. That success or gain that is not rooted in a G-dly pursuit of truth is at risk and is vulnerable to being corrupted and co-opted. Gain and success are only gifts if they dignify, elevate and humble. Shabbat Shalom.

[Liane Pritikin: Writer, Public Speaker](#)

The biggest lie on the playground: *sticks and stones may break your bones, but words will never hurt you.* Words matter. They not only matter, they give you important information about a person, a people, or a culture. Some cultures have many different words for snow because nuance is important. In Los Angeles, it’s just “snow.” The Germans have schadenfreude — pleasure or satisfaction derived from someone else’s misfortune. In Hebrew, we have beitzah, which isn’t just money, but money obtained through ill-gotten gain, perhaps through exploitation, corruption, or bribery. Or, as ChatGPT puts it, money with a “moral stain.” It’s the word used in our pasuk as part of Yisro’s advice to his son-in-law Moshe about setting up a system of delegation, so leadership doesn’t rest solely on Moshe’s shoulders. Yisro outlines four key qualities required of those leaders. Being God-fearing is another important trait. A Pew Research study asked people whether belief in God was needed to be moral. Across 17 countries, the average was 29%. In the United States, it was 34%. In Israel, 47%. That was in 2022. Another important word Yisro uses is [chayil](#), translated as “[capable](#).” It is familiar to anyone who sings Eishet Chayil at the Friday night Shabbat table, often translated as “a woman of valor.” It is also the Hebrew word for soldier — chayal, chayalim. It denotes

discipline and directed strength: power that is restrained, reliable, and morally guided. Morality is a theme embedded in the language of the Jewish people. Literally.

[Dini Coopersmith: Principal, MaayanothaTorah](#)

Yitro suggests to Moshe to appoint judges and create a whole court system, to help him handle the Jewish People.

The Ohr haChaim defines the character traits necessary for these judges: “[anshei chayil](#)” are all-around excellent people: they have perfect middot, harmony of body and soul; are balanced, disciplined and have inner happiness and peace. These are to be the supreme court judges. In the lesser courts are the God-fearing people: who would be careful not to err in judgment, “[people of truth](#)”- since they seek truth, would make good minor judges, and lastly, “[despisers-of-gain](#)”- they will at least not be tempted to take bribes.

Obviously, the “ish Chayil” the capable one, encompasses all other traits and is the ultimate perfect judge. Assuming not many of those would be found, look for “God fearing”, “truth-seekers” and at the very least “gain-haters” for the smaller courts. In the end, Moshe found (in verse 25) “anshei Chayil from all of Israel and placed them as officers of 1000, officers of 100, officers of 50 and officers of 10”. There were enough of these excellent judges to preside over all courts, supreme and minor.

It’s gratifying to learn that there were so many “capable” leaders to be found in the desert, among the people of Israel. It also reminded me of the song “eshet Chayil” praising each and every woman in Israel: she is capable, of excellent character and balance, disciplined and with inner harmony and peace.

“Who is like your People, Israel”?

[Rabbi Natan Halevy: WWW.KAHALJOSEPH.ORG](http://WWW.KAHALJOSEPH.ORG)

The Hebrew wording is “you shall see.” Hashem instructed Moshe to use his holy vision and spiritual insight to discern judges who truly fear G-d and aren’t intimidated by people. If Hashem was only telling Moshe to select judges, it would have used the word “chosen.” Instead, Moshe was charged with the task of spiritual perception. These judges must uphold the highest standards of honesty and integrity, enabling them to endure the varied personalities, pressures, and provocations of litigants. Hashem specifically emphasized Moshe’s holy spirit because a person cannot always be judged by external appearance alone; true qualification lies in refined inner character traits that must be carefully examined.

They must be men of strength and exceptional moral quality, with zeal to ensure that injustice and theft do not occur. This strength refers to physical resilience, inner fortitude of the heart and elevated spiritual virtue. Such individuals have engaged in deep inner work, refining and transforming their character to lofty levels. Our sages teach that the Divine Presence rests fully only upon one who is wise, mighty, and wealthy—wealth here understood as inner abundance and self-mastery.

Judges of this stature will naturally be respected. People will accept their rulings with trust and confidence. They must be people of truth who despise bribery and flattery, recognizing that these corrupt justice and distort judgment. They must intuitively understand that the ultimate purpose of judgment is to uphold truth and justice with humility, fully aware of the immense responsibility resting upon their shoulders.

[David Sacks: Host of the Podcast “Spiritual Tools for an Outrageous World”](#)

I don't care how high your I.Q. is, nobody can convince me that this astonishingly exquisite and precisely orchestrated universe randomly appeared out of nowhere.

Information has never been this available.

But are we getting smarter?

Imagine there's a man who is at his wedding. And he can tell you everything about it. How many tables there are, who is seated at each table, how much the flowers cost, and the price of the band. He even knows exactly when he has to be out of the wedding hall. Then he turns to you and says, there's only one thing I don't know. "Which one of these people did I marry?"

It's beyond heartbreaking. He knows absolutely everything except the one thing he needs to know. This is the world today. People can tell you everything about everything. But the one reality of the world, the fact that there is a God who created us, and sustains us, and loves us, and who is so close at all times, this they don't know. This is what it means when we say, "[The beginning of wisdom is the awareness/fear of Hashem](#)" (Psalms 111:10)

You can have ten Nobel Prizes, but if you don't know Hashem, you don't know anything. My Rebbe told me there are people with big minds but small souls. And there are people with big souls and small minds. And there are people with big souls and big minds – and those are the leaders of the Jewish People.