

How Good Is Your Advisor?

Category: Shemos, Yisro

When is advice good, and when is it bad?

Advice Givers

Any manager in the corporate world knows that a Board of Directors is necessary to give direction. What could possibly be wrong with a bit of advice?

The Jewish people are blessed with people who love giving advice. The Rebbe used to say only offer advice if it is solicited. Sure, give help if it is needed, but not advice.

In the Parsha of the week we read about Yisro. He arrives in the desert and almost immediately, he starts giving advice.

It is the day after Yom Kippur; Moses has been on the mountain for 120 days with just a few short breaks. Yisro sees Moses sitting and judging the people. The people are standing from morning to night waiting to be seen.

Yisro comments, "The thing that you are doing is not good. You will surely wear yourself out, along with this nation that is with you!" His advice to Moses is to find financially independent men to judge small cases, so Moses will have time for the big fish. Sounds like good advice, no?

The Rebbe asks (Likutei Sichos 16) why did Yisro need to give Moses this advice?

Didn't Moses realize that he might be exhausting the Jewish nation needlessly?

Moses was a faithful shepherd for the Jewish people; at the age of 20 he saved the life of a fellow Jew. He had taken them out of Egypt, encouraged them at the Red Sea, pleaded with G-d for them after the sin of the Golden Calf, and gone up to Mount Sinai three times.

He is obviously the all-time greatest lover of Israel that ever was. So why didn't it bother him that the Jews stood and waited for him all day? You don't need to be a genius to come up with the idea of delegating responsibility. Did he really need

Yisro, “the priest of Midyan,” to come along and point this out to him? The Rebbe says this is, “most astonishing.”

Moshe was a Rebbe

The answer is that Yisro was not part of the Jewish nation. He saw a long line of people by the door of the judge and knew that this is not the way things work in the world.

Yisro did not understand that Moses was the ‘Rebbe’ of the Jewish people. When the Jews stood and waited for him, he elevated them to a higher level; by the time they reached him, most of their problems sorted out by themselves. Yisro didn’t see the spiritual connection between Moses and the Jews.

A Russian Jewish doctor moved to Israel and found it very tough going. He even had trouble finding work. He decided to travel to the Rebbe, but found it hard to get a visa. He asked Chabad people for help, but they weren’t too helpful.

When he finally got to New York, he planned to go in to the Rebbe and pour out all his troubles and complaints about the ones who refused to help. He had a long list of grievances against the Chabad Chassidim, and who could deal with them better than the Rebbe? Just as he walked into the Rebbe’s room, the Rebbe smiled at him, and he realized that to the Rebbe, every person was a spiritual child. In one moment, he lost his interest in bad-mouthing them to the Rebbe; all his frustration disappeared.

What happened? He was in the environs of the Rebbe, so he was elevated and ‘forgot’ his silly wars.

At a time of great happiness or tragedy (G-d forbid) everyone forgets the divisions and unites. Last week, when we heard about the hostage situation, nobody asked, “What denomination are they?” Nobody asked, “What are their politics?” We were all elevated to a higher level and petty matters disappeared. Similarly, every Yom Kippur, a Jew can sit in synagogue and feel embarrassed about a quarrel with a friend and can then go and make peace with him.

Stop Doubting

If Moses' way was so good, why did he agree to Yisro's suggestion? There is a Yiddish saying, 'a question is treif.'

The moment there is a question, there is already room for doubt — and you have to deal with the doubt.

Here are a few examples from the Torah. In Parshas Chukas G-d tells Moses to take his stick and go with Aaron and speak to the rock. When he would speak to the rock, water would come out. So what was it that went so wrong here that resulted in Moses not being allowed to go into the land of Israel?

The answer is that when Moses and Aaron gathered all the people together, they couldn't figure out which rock to speak to, and people started heckling them. So

Moses said, "Listen rebels, can we bring forth water for you from this rock?"

The moment Moses doubted the possibility of speaking to a rock and it pouring out water, he wasn't able to do it and he ended up having to hit it with his stick.

Another example is the story of Elisha and the widow. A widow came to Elisha and told him that she was in debt and her children were going to be sold as slaves. Elisha asked what she had in the house. She said she had a jug of oil. He told her to borrow jugs from her neighbors and start pouring oil into them.

The oil kept pouring until her son said, 'There is no other vessel' and then, 'the oil stopped flowing.' Because he voiced a limitation, the oil stopped flowing.

A story is told about an agunah who came to the Rebbe, the Tzemach Tzedek to ask him to find her husband. When she got to see Tzemach Tzedek, he told her that her husband was in Petersburg. The woman asked, "And if I don't find him there"? The Tzemach Tzedek answered her, "Then travel to a second city." The woman asked, "And if he is not to be found there"? The Tzemach Tzedek answered, "Then travel to a third city." Finally, the Tzemach Tzedek stopped her questions and said, "go, go!"

When the woman arrived in Petersburg, her husband had just left in the direction of the second city. When she got to the second city, he had already left, and she

had to chase him to the third city where she finally found him.

Because she doubted the Rebbe, she couldn't find him in Petersburg, or in the second place. This is why the Tzemach Tzedek chased her out before she caused any further problems for herself. (*Mepee Hashmuah*)

In the story with Yisro, Moses knew that he could be the sole judge for the whole Jewish nation, but the moment Yisro started asking questions, something changed. It was impossible to go back to the previous state.

The lesson we can learn from this is that when a person is sure of where he is going and trusts in G-d, then he succeeds. The moment he starts questioning, he is lost.

Just do what G-d wants and the rest will work out for the best!