

# Jethro

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

Moses's father in law, Jethro, comes to visit and notices that he is sitting throughout the day dealing with issues and problems that the people are bringing to him. And they in turn are having to stand and wait for hours to have the opportunity to speak with him. He tells Moses that this is a disaster waiting to happen to him personally and to the people. Moses needs to delegate and he needs to delegate to honest, trustworthy individuals who cannot be bribed. You might say this is the first example in the Bible of a business consultant.

Yitro did not specify how many men Moshe should choose. But he did specify that they should all be men of moral strength and quality, true and honest who would not take bribes. I wonder how many politicians and leaders this could be said of nowadays, three thousand years later.

It is in the fourth book of the Torah, that the number of elders was set at 70 and this is the origin of the system that led to the establishment of the Sanhedrin (adding one to ensure there would never be stalemate). But whereas in Jethro's suggestion they were judicial administrators, the Sanhedrin was more of a religious council, albeit with responsibility to what we might call, its Civil Service.

Here we are thousands of years later and one of the most universally stressful features of our lives is bureaucracy. Very little attention is paid to the stress of people waiting in lines for hours, and bureaucrats grinding away in grim conditions, themselves under pressure and often reacting unfeelingly and impersonally. What is more, in most parts of the world bribery and corruption is endemic. The quality of the experience on both sides of the glass partition is rarely dealt with.

Yet Jethro revealed the dangers of not taking stress into consideration. Still, most governments do not seem able or willing to deal with the issue. I used to think Israeli bureaucracy was a depressing experience. But in all honesty it is no better wherever else I have lived or traveled.

And whereas we rightly focus in the plight of refugees, we rarely consider the bureaucratic nightmares they and their children usually have to endure in the process of migration. And the same goes for the poorest and most vulnerable sectors of our populations. Little has changed in four thousand years.