

חומש קורן מקראות הדורות  
THE KOREN MIKRAOT HADOROT

פרשת יתרו  
PARASHAT YITRO



KOREN



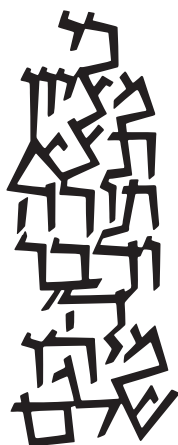
THE ROHR FAMILY EDITION

חומש קורן מקראות הדורות  
THE KOREN MIKRAOT HADOROT

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THE ZAHAVA AND MOSHAEL STRAUS EDITION OF SEFER SHEMOT

פרשת יתרו עם מפרשים  
PARASHAT YITRO WITH COMMENTARIES



TORAH TRANSLATION BY

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks שליט"א

FROM THE MAGERMAN EDITION OF THE KOREN TANAKH

COMMENTARIES COLLECTED AND ABRIDGED BY

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KMDYT01

The Rohr Family Edition of  
The Koren Mikraot HaDorot  
pays tribute to the memory of

**Mr. Sami Rohr** ז"ל  
ר' שמואל ב"ר יהושע אליהו ז"ל

who served his Maker with joy  
and whose far-reaching vision, warm open hand, love of Torah,  
and love for every Jew were catalysts for the revival and growth of  
vibrant Jewish life in the former Soviet Union  
and in countless communities the world over

and to the memory of his beloved wife

**Mrs. Charlotte Rohr (née Kastner)** ע"ה  
שרה בת ר' יקותיאל יהודה ע"ה

who survived the fires of the Shoah to become  
the elegant and gracious matriarch,  
first in Colombia and later in the United States,  
of three generations of a family  
nurtured by her love and unstinting devotion.  
She found grace in the eyes of all those whose lives she touched.

Together they merited to see all their children  
build lives enriched by faithful commitment  
to the spreading of Torah and *Ahavat Yisrael*.

Dedicated with love by  
**The Rohr Family**  
NEW YORK, USA



עֲטֹרַת זְקֵנִים בְּנֵי בָנִים

(משלי יז, ו)

*Grandchildren*

*are the crowning glory of the aged*

*(Proverbs 17:6)*

May the learning and traditions of our people  
be strengthened by our future generations.  
In honor of our wonderful grandchildren

Zahava and Moshael Straus





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TURN TO THE OTHER END OF THIS VOLUME.



## PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

The genius of Jewish commentary on the Torah is one of huge and critical import. Jewish life and law for millennia have been directed by our interpretations of the Torah, and each generation has looked to its rabbinic leadership for a deeper understanding of its teachings, its laws, its stories.

For centuries, *Mikraot Gedolot* have been a core part of understanding the Ḥumash; the words of Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Ramban, Rashbam, Ralbag, and other classic commentators illuminate and help us understand the Torah. But traditional editions of *Mikraot Gedolot* present only a slice in time and a small selection of the corpus of Jewish commentators. Almost every generation has produced rabbinic scholars who speak to their times, from Philo and Onkelos two thousand years ago, to Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Rabbi Aharon Kotler, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, and Nehama Leibowitz in ours.

*The Koren Mikraot HaDorot* – Scriptures or Interpretations for the Generations – brings two millennia of Torah commentary into the hands and homes of Jews around the world. Readers will be able not only to encounter the classic commentators, but to gain a much broader sense of the issues that scholars grappled with in their time and the inspiration they drew from the ancient texts. We see, for example, how Philo speaks to an assimilating Greek Jewish audience in first-century Alexandria, and how similar yet different it is from Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch's approach to an equally assimilating nineteenth-century German readership; how the perspectives of Rabbi Soloveitchik and Rabbi Kotler differ in a post-Holocaust world; how Rav Se'adya Gaon interpreted the Torah for the Jews of Babylonia. It is an exciting journey through Jewish history via the unchanging words of the Torah.

The text of the Torah features the exceptional new translation of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, together with the celebrated and meticulously accurate Koren Hebrew text. Of course, with the exception of Rashi – for whom we present an entirely new translation in full – the commentaries are selected. We offer this anthology not to limit our reader's exploration but rather as a gateway for further learning of Torah and its commentaries on a broader and deeper level than space here permits. We discuss below how to use this book.

We must thank **Pamela and George Rohr** of New York, who recognized the unique value of *The Koren Mikraot HaDorot* and its ability to communicate historical breadth and context to the reader. For my colleagues here at Koren, we thank you; for the many generations of users who will find this a continuing source of new learning, we are forever in your debt.

We also are indebted to **Zahava and Moshael Straus**, true leaders of this Jewish generation in so many fields, who have invested not only in *Parashat Yitro* but the entire book of Shemot. Together, we were thus able to launch this innovative and unique project.

We are honored to acknowledge and thank **Debra and David Magerman**, whose support for the Koren H̄umash with Rabbi Sacks's exemplary translation and commentary laid the foundation for the core English text of this work.

Finally, I must personally thank **Rabbi Marvin Hier**, with whom I had a special breakfast some years ago at the King David Hotel. During the meal, he raised the problem that so few people knew the writings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Rabbi Aharon Kotler on the Torah; and I, who had just read some of Philo's work, had the same reaction. From that conversation came the seed for this project.

#### HOW TO USE *THE KOREN MIKRAOT HADOROT*

*The Koren Mikraot HaDorot* will be a fifty-five-volume edition of the H̄umash (one for each *parasha* plus a companion volume). Each of the fifty-four volumes of the *parashot* can be read from right to left (Hebrew opening side), and left to right (English opening side).

Opening from the Hebrew side offers:

- ▶ the full Torah text, the translation of Rabbi Sacks, and the full commentary of Rashi in both Hebrew and the new English translation
- ▶ all *haftarot* associated with the *parasha* of the volume, including Rosh H̄odesh and special readings, both in Hebrew and English

Opening from the English side presents four sections:

- ▶ **THE TIME OF THE SAGES** – includes commentaries from the Second Temple period and the talmudic period
- ▶ **THE CLASSIC COMMENTATORS** – quotes selected explanations by Rashi as well as most of the commentators found in traditional *Mikraot Gedolot*
- ▶ **CONFRONTING MODERNITY** – selects commentaries from the eighteenth century to the close of the twentieth century
- ▶ **THE BIBLICAL IMAGINATION** – features essays surveying some of the broader conceptual ideas as a supplement to the linear, text-based commentary

The first three of these sections each feature the relevant verses, in Hebrew and English, on the page alongside their respective commentaries, in chronological order, providing the reader with a single window onto the text without excessive page turning.

In addition to being a valuable resource in a Jewish home or synagogue library, we conceived of these volumes as a weekly accompaniment in the synagogue. There is scope for the reader to study each *parasha* on a weekly basis in preparation for the reading on Shabbat. One may select a particular group of commentators for study that week, or perhaps alternate between ancient and modern viewpoints. Some readers may choose to delve into the text through verse-by-verse interpretation, while others may prefer a conceptual perspective on the *parasha* as a whole. The broad array of options for learning means this is a series which can be returned to year after year, always presenting new insights and new approaches to understanding the text.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The creation of this book was possible only thanks to the small but exceptional team here at Koren Jerusalem. We are grateful to:

- ▶ Rabbi Tzvi Hersh Weinreb, שליט"א, who conceptualized the structure of the project and provides both moral and halakhic leadership at Koren
- ▶ Rabbi Shai Finkelstein, whose encyclopedic knowledge of Torah and its interpreters is equaled only by his community leadership, formerly in Memphis and today in Jerusalem
- ▶ Rabbi Yedidya Naveh, whose knowledge, organizational skills, and superb leadership brought the disparate elements together
- ▶ Rabbi Jonathan Mishkin, translator of the commentaries, who crafted a fluent, accurate, and eloquent English translation

Our design, editing, typesetting, and proofreading staff, including Tani Bayer, Esther Be'er, Debbie Ismailoff, Estie Dishon, Tomi Mager, and Carolyn Budow Ben David, enabled an attractive, user-friendly, and accurate edition of these works.

“One silver basin” (Numbers 7:13) was brought as a symbol of the Torah, which has been likened to wine, as the verse states: “And drink of the wine which I have mingled” (Proverbs 9:5). Because it is customary to drink wine in a basin – as we see in the verse “that drink wine in basins” (Amos 6:6) – he therefore brought a basin. “Of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary” (Numbers 7:13). Why? Because just as the numerical value of “wine” [*yayin*] is seventy, so there are seventy modes of expounding the Torah. (Bemidbar Rabba 13:16)

Each generation produces exceptional rabbinic, intellectual leadership. It has been our purpose to enable all Jews to taste the wine of those generations, in the hope of expanding the breadth and depth of their knowledge. Torah is our greatest treasure, and we need the wisdom of those generations to better understand this bountiful gift from God. We hope that we at Koren can deepen that understanding for all who seek it.

Matthew Miller, Publisher  
Jerusalem, 5780 (2019)

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Over the course of millennia, the Jewish people have watched while the surrounding society and its values have changed unceasingly. For the Jews, the steadfast response to an evolving world has always been the study of Torah, specifically engagement with the weekly *parasha*. Devotees of Jewish learning have always looked to the weekly Torah portion for spiritual and intellectual guidance through life's challenges. And in every generation, commentaries on the *Humash* have debated the precise interpretation of the verses therein. These scholars have continuously asked what message God is trying to convey to Israel and the world through the Torah's narratives and laws. Their explanations have struggled to identify the correct ways to apply its lessons to our daily lives.

Throughout, all these authors have approached the Torah text from their own unique perspectives, shaped in no small measure by the eras and environments they lived in. Naturally, the pantheon of commentaries present widely different styles in their writings. Occasionally the commentators will subject a particular verse to piercing scrutiny as a self-contained unit. At other times they present interpretations that seem to stray from the straightforward meaning of the text. Ultimately, all commentaries demand that a verse provide readers with theological meaning and direction for communal and social life.

Recognition of the wisdom embedded in the vast literature of commentary on the Torah spanning the various eras of Jewish history planted the seeds of the project whose fruit you now hold. We have called this publication *Mikraot HaDorot* – Readings of the Generations. This window into the world of Torah commentaries is not simply an upgrade of the classical *Mikraot Gedolot* collections, which give readers merely a handful of familiar

interpretations. *The Koren Mikraot HaDorot* instead presents a plethora of exegetical contributions, with more than forty scholars spanning Jewish teachings from the past two thousand years represented on its pages.

Each volume of the *Koren Mikraot HaDorot* series can be opened from both the right (Hebrew) side and left (English) side. The Hebrew opening side includes the Hebrew and a new English text of the *parasha*, translated by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, with a full, new translation of Rashi and the *haftarot*. The English opening side contains the bulk of the commentaries, and is divided into four parts: The first, **THE TIME OF THE SAGES**, comprises commentaries from antiquity – ranging from Philo to the Yalkut Shimoni. These figures lived mainly in the land of Israel, Egypt, and Babylonia. The second, **THE CLASSIC COMMENTATORS**, contains interpretations from the Middle Ages – starting from Rav Se'adya Gaon and Rashi and continuing through time to the work of Rabbi Shlomo Efrayim of Luntschitz, author of the *Keli Yakar*. The authors included here represent the rich traditions of both Sephardic (Spanish and North African) and Ashkenazic (central and eastern European) schools of exegesis. The third section, **CONFRONTING MODERNITY**, offers the work of both Old World and New World scholars who lived between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. Before each of these three sections we include a time line that specifies the chronological relationships between the commentators and the places they lived.

In the final section, **THE BIBLICAL IMAGINATION**, we provide three in-depth investigations of particular ideas through the writings of the various commentaries. There are several goals to these essays. First, we aim to reveal common threads weaving across the generations of Torah scholarship. Second, we hope to illustrate how the various authors were influenced by their lives and times, and that the lessons they transmitted to their communities reflected their environments. Finally, each essay highlights for the reader some central issues that the commentaries have grappled with. We trust that this tool will facilitate the reader's understanding of the words of the commentaries themselves.

Three principles have governed the decision making in our work on *The Koren Mikraot HaDorot*:

- ▶ Chronological order: We have striven to sketch out the historical development of Torah exegesis, an enterprise that has occupied innumerable communities of Jews in far-flung lands for centuries.



- Economy of selection: In compiling the excerpts used in this work, we have gone through the authors' works and isolated those sections which most directly address the particular question, issue, or difficulty that confronted the scholar.
- Objectivity of presentation: This book presents ideas of the commentaries authentically, never censoring them or smoothing them over in light of our own positions or perspectives. We always strove to faithfully transmit the legal, conceptual, social, and ethical messages of the commentators.

The modern world constantly challenges us as individuals, as a society, and as communal leaders, teachers, and parents. The values and culture of the society that surrounds us force thinking Jews to seriously consider and reconsider their ideas and priorities on a regular basis as we struggle to find the correct path through life. Furthermore, we constantly must ask ourselves what teachings we wish to transmit to future generations. It is our hope that the *Koren Mikraot HaDorot* project will help guide its readers as they grapple with these very real problems. The world of Torah commentary is wide and deep beyond measure. It contains innumerable answers to the questions that face the individual, the family, the generation, and indeed all of humanity.

Rabbi Shai Finkelstein, Editor-in-Chief  
Jerusalem, 5780 (2019)

## A NOTE ON THE TRANSLATION

The terse writing style prevalent in Jewish scholarship over most of history can be difficult for the modern reader to decipher. Since our goal in the *Koren Mikraot HaDorot* series is to make thousands of years of Torah commentary accessible to a modern, English-speaking audience, we have opted for a relatively loose translation style that accurately presents the content of the Hebrew commentary while not necessarily mirroring its exact syntax. We have also resorted occasionally to paraphrase in instances where a literal translation would be opaque in English. As any student of Torah exegesis will recognize, draconian insistence on a word-for-word translation would result in an English text that was unreadable and that preserved neither the clarity nor the majesty of the original Hebrew.

Many of the commentaries' discussions focus on the meanings of words and phrases that are ambiguous in the Hebrew text of the *parasha*. The beautiful new translation of the Torah by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks that we include here often dispels these ambiguities in the interest of clarity, necessarily coming down on one side or the other of a disagreement between commentators. The reader of the commentaries should therefore view the Torah translation presented here as one possible reading of the often-cryptic Hebrew original. In a similar vein, the significance of certain interpretations may seem unclear, or their points obvious, until one encounters another commentary with a starkly different read of the same verse. These contrasts, and the realization that themes and meanings we thought to be clear are actually ambiguous and multifaceted, are the essence of *The Koren Mikraot HaDorot*.

We have, as far as possible, allowed each text to speak for itself, and have left editorial comments to a minimum. Nevertheless, the commentaries

often assume the reader's knowledge of other biblical episodes, midrashim, or Hebrew grammar beyond what might be expected from the English-speaking public today. To ensure clarity, we have therefore interpolated brief editor's notes where we deemed it necessary, setting them off from the original text in square brackets.

Throughout Jewish history, the text of the Tanakh has been viewed as the apogee of the Hebrew language. For many commentators, especially those of the Middle Ages, it served as a fountain of language from which they drew numerous idioms and phrases. The result is that the Hebrew text of many commentaries is shot through with snippets of biblical prose or poetry to such an extent that almost every sentence can be viewed as a quote or allusion. Marking and citing all of these would make for a cluttered translation and would hinder rather than enhance the reader's understanding. We have therefore opted to cite only those quotes which are brought by the author as explicit evidence to further the point being made, and not those that supply only a turn of phrase.

The Hebrew side of this volume contains a complete and unabridged translation of Rashi's commentary. For those who wish to follow the *parasha* on the English side of the book, we have also reprinted many of Rashi's explanations alongside those of the other classic commentators. This will allow the reader to compare Rashi's interpretation to those of Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, and others, as well as appreciate how Rashi's commentary often serves to define the issues that will be addressed by later exegetes.

The text of the commentaries is of course abridged. We have not included ellipses to mark every point where text has been omitted, to maintain a clutter-free translation. However, we have included ellipses at points where the subject of discussion would otherwise appear to have changed abruptly and inexplicably, to save the reader confusion. We have also not adhered strictly to the original heading, or *s.v.* (*dibbur hamat-hil*) of every text, changing it in instances where it would help to focus the reader on those words that are the actual subject of discussion, and adding it to texts that did not originally have it.

Most of the commentaries that we quote in this series were originally organized by chapter and verse. Therefore, anyone who wishes to consult the original Hebrew text of a given commentary can simply open to the verse in question. However, not all sources are organized this way. The midrashim in particular are often ordered loosely; an important interpretation of a verse in Exodus might be found in a midrash on Deuteronomy. For the reader's convenience in locating the original Hebrew source, we have

provided citations for those works not organized sequentially, as well as for commentaries originally composed on verses other than the one under discussion. These citations can be found outside of the final punctuation at the end of the excerpt in question.

Our translation has generally relied upon the Hebrew text found in the Bar-Ilan Responsa Project and the online compendia Sefaria and AlHatorah.org, as well as the standard printed editions of commentaries not found in any of these. The Responsa Project contains more than one edition of several midrashim (Midrash Tanḥuma, Midrash Rabba, and Avot DeRabbi Natan). For these works, our citations should be understood as referring to the standard editions published in Vilna and Warsaw unless otherwise indicated. Aside from this, please note:

- ▶ Text from Mekhilta DeRabbi Shimon is understood to be from the Epstein-Melamed edition unless otherwise indicated.
- ▶ Excerpts from Ibn Ezra are almost always taken from his Long Commentary on Exodus, and we have marked those instances where we quote from his Short Commentary.
- ▶ Passages from Philo are quoted with permission from *Torah from Alexandria: Philo as a Biblical Commentator*, edited by Rabbi Michael Leo Samuel (New York: Kodesh Press, 2015).
- ▶ Selected commentaries of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik are printed with permission from *Chumash Mesoras HaRav*, edited by Dr. Arnold Lustiger (New York: OU Press and Ohr Publishing Inc., 2017).
- ▶ The commentaries of the Lubavitcher Rebbe are quoted from *The Torah, with an Interpolated Translation and Commentary Based on the Works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe*, edited by Rabbi Chaim Nochum Cunin and Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky (New York: Kehot Publication Society, 2017).
- ▶ The commentaries of Nehama Leibowitz are translated, with generous permission, from the Hebrew *Iyyunim Hadashim BeSefer Shemot* (14<sup>th</sup> edition), published by the World Zionist Organization Department for Torah Education and Culture in the Diaspora.

While we have thus done our best to aid the reader in finding and consulting the original Hebrew text of the commentaries we have translated, we emphasize that this is not a critical edition, and the scope and readership of the series do not permit us to fully cite every allusion and internal reference

that authors make to midrashim and other commentaries. Still, we have made a supreme effort to provide citations of talmudic passages, and of course biblical verses, quoted or referred to in the material included here.

Yedidya Naveh, Managing Editor  
Jerusalem, 5780 (2019)

1<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY BCE

1<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY CE

2<sup>ND</sup> CENTURY

3<sup>RD</sup> CENTURY

4<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

5<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

6<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

7<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

8<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

9<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

10<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

11<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

12<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

13<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

PHILO, 25 BCE – 50 CE

HALAKHIC MIDRASHIM, 3<sup>RD</sup> CENTURY  
(MEKHILTA, SIFRA, SIFREI)

SEDER ELIYAHU, 3<sup>RD</sup> CENTURY

TALMUD YERUSHALMI, 3<sup>RD</sup> – 5<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

TALMUD BAVLI, 3<sup>RD</sup> – 6<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

MIDRASH TANḤUMA, 5<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

PESIKTA DERAV KAHANA,  
5<sup>TH</sup> – 6<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

AVOT DERABBI NATAN, 7<sup>TH</sup> – 9<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

MIDRASH RABBA, 5<sup>TH</sup> – 12<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

PESIKTA RABBATI, 9<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

AGGADAT BERESHIT, 9<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

MIDRASH SHMUEL, 9<sup>TH</sup> – 11<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

BERESHIT RABBATI, 11<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

MIDRASH LEKAḤ TOV, 11<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

MIDRASH SEKHEL TOV, 1139

MIDRASH AGGADA, 12<sup>TH</sup> – 13<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

YALKUT SHIMONI, 13<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

פרשת יתרו  
PARASHAT YITRO

---

THE **TIME**  
OF THE **SAGES**

יח <sup>א</sup> וַיִּשְׁמַע יִתְרוֹ כִּהְיָן מִדְּיָן חֹתֵן מֹשֶׁה אֶת־בְּלֶ-אִשְׁרָעֵשָׂה יֵד  
 אֱלֹהִים לְמֹשֶׁה וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל עַמּוֹ בִּיהוּצִיא יְהוָה אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל  
 כ <sup>ב</sup> מִמִּצְרַיִם: וַיִּקַּח יִתְרוֹ חֹתֵן מֹשֶׁה אֶת־צִפּוֹרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ מֹשֶׁה  
 ג <sup>ג</sup> אַחַר שְׁלוּחֶיהָ: וְאֵת שְׁנֵי בָנֶיהָ אֲשֶׁר שָׂם הָאֱחָד גֵּרְשֹׁם

## CHAPTER 18, VERSE 1

## MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON

וַיִּשְׁמַע יִתְרוֹ – *Yitro heard*: Yitro was originally called Yeter [see 4:18], but as recognition of his pleasant acts, the letter *vav* was added to his

name, making it “Yitro”. [As one of the letters of God’s name, the *vav* signifies sanctity.]

## SEDER ELIYAHU RABBA

יִתְרוֹ כִּהְיָן מִדְּיָן חֹתֵן מֹשֶׁה – *Moshe’s father-in-law Yitro, priest of Midyan*: We learn from this story that a man should insist on marrying off his daughter to a Torah scholar, no matter how

high the dowry. For we see that Yitro was only blessed [with fame and fortune] due to the merits of Moshe.

## TALMUD YERUSHALMI,

וַיִּשְׁמַע יִתְרוֹ – *Yitro heard*: What did Yitro hear? Hizkiya taught: He heard about the splitting of the sea. (Megilla 1:11)

## TALMUD BAVLI

וַיִּשְׁמַע יִתְרוֹ כִּהְיָן מִדְּיָן – *Yitro, priest of Midyan heard*: What did Yitro hear that led him to meet up with Israel and convert to their religion? Rabbi Yehoshua taught: He heard about Israel’s military victory against Amalek, for the text immediately prior to this chapter states: *And*

*Yehoshua overcame Amalek and his people by the sword* (17:13). Rabbi Elazar HaModa’i taught: Yitro heard the Torah being given. For when God spoke to Israel at Mount Sinai, the sound of His voice traveled the length and breadth of the world. (Zevahim 116a)

## TANHUMA

וַיִּשְׁמַע יִתְרוֹ – *Yitro heard*: After Yitro heard about Israel’s success, he made a decision that benefited him. Originally Yitro had been a priest in the service of idolatry, but he gave it all up to come and join Moshe’s mission. In reward he was taken under the wings of the Divine Presence and credited with introducing Israel’s system of justice. (Yitro 2) וַיִּשְׁמַע יִתְרוֹ – *Yitro heard*: Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to Moshe: I am the One who created the world through speech alone. And I am the One who brings close the distant ones without distancing those who are already close, as the verse

states: *Am I a God near at hand, says the Lord, and not a God far off?* (Jeremiah 23:23). Just as I embraced Yitro who came from afar rather than rebuff him, you too should adopt a similar attitude. Should a gentile approach you wishing to convert, you should welcome him and not discourage him. Immediately, *Moshe went out to greet his father-in-law* (18:7). Said our Sages, of blessed memory: Moshe did not set out alone, but was accompanied by Aharon, Nadav, Avihu, and all the elders of Israel. Thus does the verse state: *The wise inherit honor* (Proverbs 3:35). (Yitro 6)



- 18 <sup>1</sup> Moshe's father-in-law Yitro, priest of Midyan, heard about all that God had done for Moshe and for His people Israel when  
<sup>2</sup> the LORD brought Israel out of Egypt. Yitro had received  
<sup>3</sup> Moshe's wife Tzipora after he had sent her home, together with her two sons. One was named Gershom, for Moshe had

VERSE 2

MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON

**אַחַר שְׁלוּחֶיהָ** – *After he had sent her home:* When had Moshe sent his wife back to Midyan? After God commanded him to descend to Egypt and to lead the Israelites out of that country, Moshe saddled up his wife and sons, and traveled with them on a donkey to see his compatriots. At the same time, God directed Aharon to set out to meet his brother in the wilderness. Upon their reunion, Moshe and Aharon began to hug and kiss each other. Said Aharon: "Moshe, my brother – where have you been all these years?" Moshe answered: "I have been living in Midyan." "And

who are these people you have with you?" Aharon asked. Said Moshe: "They are my wife and children." "Where then are you taking them?" continued his brother. "To Egypt, of course," said Moshe. Said Aharon: "Here we are distressed over the fate of the Hebrews who are already ensnared in that horrid country, and you wish to introduce more people into bondage?" As soon as Moshe heard that, he addressed Tzipora and told her to turn around and head back home to her father. And so she did, which explains the verses *After he had sent her home, together with her two sons* (18:2–3).

VERSE 3

MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON

**גֵר הָיִיתִי בְּאֶרֶץ מִדְיָן** – *I have been a stranger in a foreign land:* Rabbi Yehoshua taught: Moshe felt like an outsider in Midyan, where he knew no one. Rabbi Elazar HaModa'i taught: What Moshe meant by this statement was

that all the citizens of Midyan worshipped idols – gods that were foreign to his belief, while He served the One who spoke and created the world.

SEKHEL TOV

**וְיָצְאָתָּה עִמָּךְ שְׁנֵי בְנֵיךָ** – *Together with her two sons:* Gershom and Eliezer are referred to as Tzipora's sons rather than Moshe's because their father

had sent them back to Midyan upon Aharon's advice. The language of the verse emphasizes that the two were raised by their mother.

MIDRASH AGGADA

**שֵׁם הָאָחִיד גֶּרְשֹׁם** – *One was named Gershom:* Yitro forced Moshe to agree to circumcise just one of his sons, and to leave the other one uncircumcised. Hence the occurrence at

the lodging place, where *the LORD confronted Moshe and was about to kill him* (4:24). Eliezer was the boy who had not been circumcised back in Midyan.

כִּי אָמַר גַּר הָיִיתִי בְּאֶרֶץ נֹכְרִיהַ: וְשֵׁם הָאֶחָד אֱלִיעֶזֶר כִּי  
 אֱלֹהֵי אָבִי בְּעֵזְרִי וַיַּצִּלֵנִי מִחֶרֶב פְּרָעָה: וַיָּבֵא יְתָרוֹ חֵתָן  
 מֹשֶׁה וּבָנָיו וְאִשְׁתּוֹ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הַמְּדַבֵּר אֲשֶׁר־הוּא חֲנָה  
 שֵׁם הָרַ הָאֱלֹהִים: וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אֲנִי חֵתָנְךָ יְתָרוֹ בֶּן־

## VERSE 4

MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON

וַיַּצִּלֵנִי מִחֶרֶב פְּרָעָה – *Saving me from Pharaoh’s sword*: When exactly did God save Moshe from Pharaoh’s sword? Rabbi Yehoshua taught: This happened during the episode of the quarrelling Israelites, when Datan criticized Moshe, saying: *Who made you a ruler and judge over us?* (2:14). Rabbi Eleazar HaModa’i said: Once Moshe’s killing of the Egyptian became known, he was arrested and taken up to the platform for execution. The soldiers bound him and bowed his neck under the sword. At that moment an angel descended from heaven disguised as Moshe. At once the guard turned from Moshe and seized his lookalike. Rabbi Eliezer taught: In punishing the soldiers

who had arrested Moshe, God divided them into three groups. He turned some of them mute, made others deaf, and afflicted the rest with blindness. The sightless soldiers shouted at their colleagues: Where has Moshe escaped to? But those who had become deaf could not hear them, and those who suddenly lacked the faculty of speech could not answer. Meanwhile, of course, the blind men could not locate Moshe, who easily escaped. It is to this salvation that God referred when He said to Moshe: *Who gives man speech? Who makes people dumb or deaf? Who gives them sight or blindness? Is it not I, the Lord?* (4:11).

TALMUD YERUSHALMI

וַיַּצִּלֵנִי מִחֶרֶב פְּרָעָה – *Saving me from Pharaoh’s sword*: Early in Moshe’s story, the Torah reports that *Moshe fled from Pharaoh’s presence* (2:15), as if it were possible for a person to escape the reach of the empire! Rather, this is what happened: Moshe was arrested by the king’s men, whereupon Pharaoh decreed that he be executed. But when the executioner brought his sword down upon Moshe’s neck it first became dull and then broke into pieces. Indeed,

it is Moshe’s neck that the verse refers to when it states: *Your neck is like a tower of ivory* (Song of Songs 7:5). Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi taught in the name of Rabbi Evyatar: Not only did the soldier’s knife ricochet off Moshe’s neck but it flew back at his own and killed him. This is what the verse means when it states: *Saving me from Pharaoh’s sword* – He rescued me while dispatching the executioner. (Berakhot 9:1)

BEMIDBAR RABBA

וְשֵׁם הָאֶחָד אֱלִיעֶזֶר – *And the other, Eliezer*: Rabbi Aḥa said in the name of Rabbi Ḥanina: When Moshe went up to the heavens, he heard the Holy One, blessed be He, sitting and studying the passage of the red heifer (Numbers 19), and citing a teaching: Said God:

Rabbi Eliezer taught: The animal used in the ceremony of the heifer whose neck is broken [see Deuteronomy 21:1–9] must be a year old, while the cow used in the rite of the red heifer must be two years old. Said Moshe to God: Master of the Universe! May it be your will that

4 said, “I have been a stranger in a foreign land,” and the other, Eliezer, for he had said, “My father’s God has helped me, saving me from Pharaoh’s sword.” And now Moshe’s father-in-law Yitro came to Moshe in the desert, bringing his sons and his wife, to where he was encamped by the mountain of God. Yitro sent word to Moshe, “I am coming to you – your father-in-law

\_\_\_\_\_ BEMIDBAR RABBA (cont.) \_\_\_\_\_

this scholar should be a descendant of mine. *the other, Eliezer, alluding to the other, future Whereupon God vowed to him: I swear by Rabbi Eliezer. (Hukat 19:7) your life that he will! Thus the verse states: And*

VERSE 5

\_\_\_\_\_ MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON \_\_\_\_\_

אֱלֹהֵי הַמִּדְבָּר – *In the desert:* The text recounts a shocking transition made by Yitro. Here was a man who lived his life in luxury in Midyan, where he enjoyed the honor lavished upon him as a leader of his community. But he gave all of that up to live in the wilderness, where he would have nothing. This is why the text emphasizes that Yitro *came to Moshe in the desert.*

\_\_\_\_\_ SEKHEL TOV \_\_\_\_\_

הַר הָאֱלֹהִים – *The mountain of God:* The verse refers to Mount Horev, where God would soon reveal Himself. The phrase teaches us that a person is never honored through the places he visits. Rather, it is due to an illustrious visitor that a place becomes respected. Thus the site is called “the mountain of God” [because of God’s presence there at that time].

VERSE 6

\_\_\_\_\_ LEKAH TOV \_\_\_\_\_

בָּא אֵלַיְךָ – *Coming to you:* It is polite to always announce one’s arrival when going to visit a friend. This is illustrated by Yitro, who sent a message saying: *I am coming to you – your father-in-law Yitro.* Our Sages learn from this that just as a person should never burst into his own home [for fear of startling his family], he should certainly not behave thus when coming to a friend’s house. (Genesis 46:28)

בָּא אֵלַיְךָ – *Coming to you:* I am coming out of love for you. If you choose to venerate me, come out to receive me. And if not for my sake, then walk out to accept your wife. And if you do not wish to honor her, then at least come out to see her two sons. This is why Yitro emphasized that he had traveled *together with your wife and both of your sons.* (Exodus 18:6)

\_\_\_\_\_ MIDRASH AGGADA \_\_\_\_\_

בָּא אֵלַיְךָ – *Coming to you:* Why did Yitro need to identify himself? This shows that Yitro tried to penetrate the miraculous cloud surrounding Israel’s camp but found that he was unable to do so. Instead, he shot in an arrow with a message tied to it, saying: *I am coming to you – your father-in-law.* Moshe immediately walked through the cloud and came out to greet his father-in-law.

אֵלֶיךָ וְאַשְׁתַּחֲוֶינֶיךָ וּשְׁנֵי בְנֵיךָ עִמָּהּ: וַיֵּצֵא מֹשֶׁה לְקָרְאֵת חֲתָנּוֹ  
 וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶינֵהוּ וַיִּשְׁקֶלְלוּ וַיִּשְׂאָלוּ אִישׁ-לְרֵעֵהוּ לְשָׁלוֹם וַיָּבֹאוּ  
 הָאֱלֹהִים: וַיִּסְפֹּר מֹשֶׁה לְחֲתָנּוֹ אֵת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה יְהוָה  
 לְפָרְעֹה וּלְמִצְרַיִם עַל אֹדֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵת כָּל-הַתְּלָאָה אֲשֶׁר  
 מִצְרַאתֶם בְּדֶרֶךְ וַיֵּצֵאֵם יְהוָה: וַיַּחַד יִתְרוֹ עַל כָּל-הַטּוֹבָה  
 אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה יְהוָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הִצִּילוֹ מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם:

## VERSE 7

MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON

לְקָרְאֵת חֲתָנּוֹ – *To greet his father-in-law*: Note how astounding this story is. Here was a man who had previously spent every day offering sacrifices and burning incense in honor of his false deities. Yet now he brought burnt offerings and other sacrifices to God. Now why does the subsequent verse exclude Moshe

when it states: *And Aharon and all the elders of Israel came to break bread with Moshe's father-in-law* (18:12) – had Moshe himself not gone out to greet his father-in-law? The verse signifies that while the others ate, Moshe stood and served them.

## TANHUMA

וַיֵּצֵא מֹשֶׁה – *Moshe went out*: When Yitro arrived to visit, the text reports that *Moshe went out to greet his father-in-law*. At that moment, who could have seen Moshe leaving to honor his wife's father and not have joined the procession? Who would have seen the chiefs over the thousands, and the chiefs over the hundreds leaving and not joined them?

Is there anyone who could have witnessed the seventy elders walking out of the camp and not followed them? And anyone who was left and saw Aharon the High Priest walking out – would he have not joined everybody else? In the end, the entire nation of Israel left the camp to greet Yitro. (Vayigash 7)

## MIDRASH AGGADA

וַיִּשְׂאָלוּ אִישׁ-לְרֵעֵהוּ לְשָׁלוֹם – *Each asked after the other's welfare*: [Literally, "one man asked after the other's welfare."] Who exactly asked after whose welfare? We can infer that Moshe our teacher was the considerate one. For here

the verse here refers to a "man" [*ish*], while elsewhere the text states: *Now the man Moshe was very humble* (Numbers 12:3), which shows that the term "man" always refers to Moshe.

## YALKUT SHIMONI

וַיֵּצֵא מֹשֶׁה לְקָרְאֵת חֲתָנּוֹ – *Moshe went out to greet his father-in-law*: What does the verse imply when it states, *And Aharon and all the elders of Israel came to break bread with Moshe's father-in-law before God* (18:12)? The text teaches that when an individual goes

out to greet his fellow, it is as if he is appearing before the Divine Presence. Rabbi Avin taught: Whenever a person partakes of a meal attended by a Torah scholar, it is as if he is basking in the glow of the Divine Presence. (Yitro 270)

7 Yitro – together with your wife and both of your sons.” Moshe went out to greet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him. Each asked after the other’s welfare, and they went inside  
 8 the tent. And Moshe told his father-in-law all that the LORD had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians for Israel’s sake, all the hardship they had encountered along the way, and how the  
 9 LORD had rescued them. Yitro delighted in all the good that the LORD had done for Israel, in His liberating them from the

VERSE 8

SEKHEL TOV

וַיְסַפֵּר מֹשֶׁה לְהֹרְתֵנוּ – *And Moshe told his father-in-law:* Moshe related all of Israel’s previous adventures in order to draw Yitro toward the Torah. אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה יְהוָה – *All that the LORD had done:* Moshe wanted Yitro to thank God for Israel’s salvation. אֵת כָּל־הַקְּשָׁיוֹת – *All the hardship:* The term *tela* connotes toil and exhaustion [lei’ut]. וְאֲשֶׁר מִצָּעָתָם – *They had encountered:* Moshe described to Yitro how Pharaoh and his cavalry had pursued Israel; he told him how Israel had become trapped

between the desert on one side and the sea on the other; he related Israel’s arrival at Mara and the bitter water the people found there, their experience of hunger in the Sin Desert and their thirst for water in Refidim, and how the nation engaged Amalek in battle and were rescued by God. Moshe told his father-in-law that through all these trials God had sustained Israel and redeemed them from their state of need to a place of satisfaction.

YALKUT SHIMONI

אֵת כָּל־הַקְּשָׁיוֹת – *All the hardship:* This refers to the crisis at the Sea of Reeds. וְאֲשֶׁר מִצָּעָתָם בְּדֶרֶךְ – *They had encountered*

*along the way:* Here Moshe related the story of the war against Amalek [which immediately precedes this story]. (Yitro 268)

VERSE 9

PHILO

וַיִּחַד יִתְרוֹ – *Yitro delighted:* Yitro is a blend of vanity and loves to associate with a city or commonwealth that is peopled by a

promiscuous horde. He moves about and follows whatever happens to be the popular opinion.

MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON

וַיִּחַד יִתְרוֹ עַל כָּל־הַטּוֹבָה – *Yitro delighted in all the good:* Rabbi Yehoshua taught: Yitro was delighted when he heard about the manna, for this is how Moshe described it to him: “This manna that God is serving us contains a range of flavors to suit any palate. It tastes like bread to some people, like meat to others, while there are some individuals to whom it tastes

like fish, like locusts or like any other available taste in the world.” We know that Moshe elaborated on the wonder of the manna due to the phrase “in all the good” [*al kol hatova*], which is especially wordy [the verse could have merely stated *batova* and suffered the same meaning]. Rabbi Elazar HaModa’i taught: Yitro was astounded to hear about the miracle of the

וַיֹּאמֶר יִתְרוֹ בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר הִצִּיל אֶתְכֶם מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם  
 וּמִיַּד פְּרַעֲזֵה אֲשֶׁר הִצִּיל אֶת־הָעַם מִתַּחַת יַד־מִצְרַיִם׃  
 עֲתָה יָדַעְתִּי כִּי־גָדוֹל יְהוָה מִכָּל־הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי בִדְבַר אֲשֶׁר

MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON (*cont.*)

well, which Moshe described to him as follows: "God has provided us with a well whose water tastes different to different people. It tastes like honey to some, like milk to others, while there are still others to whom it tastes like fresh or aged wine or like any other available taste in the world." We know that Moshe elaborated on the wonder of the water due to the phrase *al kol hatova*. Rabbi Eliezer taught:

Yitro was impressed to hear about the lands which God planned to bequeath the Israelites, for this is how Moshe described Israel's future: "We will one day inherit the land of Israel, the World to Come, and a new world governed by the Davidic monarchy and guided by the priestly class and the tribe of Levi." We know that Moshe elaborated on this point due to the phrase *al kol hatova*.

## TALMUD BAVLI

וַיִּחַדַּד יִתְרוֹ עַל כָּל־הַטּוֹבָה – *Yitro delighted in all the good*: Rav and Shmuel interpreted the word *vayihad* in opposite ways. Rav taught: The verse teaches that Yitro passed a sharp [*hada*] knife over his flesh [that is, he circumcised himself in an act of conversion].

Whereas Shmuel taught: Yitro's flesh prickled with goosebumps [*hadudim*, upon hearing the fate of the Egyptians]. Rav replied: This reaction of his would explain the aphorism "Do not disparage a gentile to a convert even after ten generations." (Sanhedrin 94a)

## TANHUMA

וַיִּחַדַּד יִתְרוֹ עַל כָּל־הַטּוֹבָה – *Yitro delighted in all the good*: Do not read the word as *vayihad* but as *vayihad*, meaning that upon hearing of Israel's miraculous ordeal, Yitro became a Jew [*Yehudi*]. Now what did Yitro convey when he said: *Blessed be the LORD* (18:10)? He declared: In

all my life there has not been a single foreign deity whom I have neglected to worship, and still I have never heard of a God like the God of Israel. *Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods* (18:11).

## MIDRASH AGGADA

וַיִּחַדַּד יִתְרוֹ עַל כָּל־הַטּוֹבָה – *Yitro delighted in all the good*: [The obscure word *vayihad* signifies] that Yitro's flesh felt like a sharp [*hada*] sword had pricked it [he was terrified to hear

of the suffering the Egyptians had endured]. Another interpretation: The verse should be taken at face value, meaning that the man was overjoyed to hear Moshe's tale.

## VERSE 10

## TALMUD BAVLI

וַיֹּאמֶר יִתְרוֹ בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה – *And said, "Blessed be the LORD"*: A *tanna* taught in the name of Rabbi Pappias: How embarrassing for Moshe and his six hundred thousand compatriots that

nobody thought to declare: "Blessed be the LORD," until Yitro arrived and made such a proclamation. (Sanhedrin 94a)

10 Egyptians – and said, “Blessed be the LORD who has rescued  
 you from Egypt and Pharaoh and liberated the people from  
 11 the Egyptians’ hands. Now I know that the LORD is greater  
 than all gods – for He brought upon them what they schemed

LEKAH TOV

וַיֹּאמֶר יִתְרוֹ בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה – *And said, “Blessed be the LORD”*: Because Yitro was the first to praise God by saying: “Blessed be the LORD,” a statement that not a single Hebrew from among a nation of six hundred thousand thought to

utter, his descendants were rewarded with seats on the Sanhedrin in the Hall of the Hewn Stone [the great court chamber in the Temple; see I Chronicles 2:55 concerning the Kenites, who are linked to Yitro in Judges 1:16].

VERSE 11

MEKHILTA DERABBI YISHMAEL

עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי – *Now I know*: Said Yitro to Moshe: In truth, I have long been aware of the existence of God, but now His greatness has been confirmed in my eyes since His reputation has spread throughout the world. For the very method that the Egyptians thought to use

to destroy the Israelites [i.e., drowning their children in the Nile] has been turned against them [at the Sea of Reeds]. Thus the verse states: *For He brought upon them what they schemed against others.* (Massekhta DeVayhi 6)

MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON

מִכָּל־הָאֱלֹהִים – *Than all gods*: What astonished Yitro was that no slave had ever escaped from Egypt before, yet now God had freed

a nation of six hundred thousand men from it. This is why he declared: *The Lord is greater than all gods.*

TALMUD BAVLI

בְּדָבַר אֲשֶׁר זָדוּ עֲלֵיהֶם – *What they schemed against others*: What does the verse imply? It means that the Egyptians themselves were cooked in the pot they had boiled for others. [That is, they were drowned as punishment for drowning the Hebrew babies.] And how do we know that the term *zadu* connotes cooking? From the verse *And Yaakov cooked pottage [nazid]* (Genesis 25:29). Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba taught in the name of Rabbi Simai:

Three individuals were present when the plot to drown the Israelites babies was hatched: Bilam, Iyov and Yitro. Bilam was the one who came up with the idea, and for that he was killed [in Numbers 31:8]; Iyov was silent when he heard about it, and for failing to object he was stricken with torments; Yitro, who fled the horror of the Egyptians’ plan, was rewarded by having his descendants sit in the Hall of the Hewn Stone [as members of the Sanhedrin]. (Sota 11a)

KOHELET RABBA

מִכָּל־הָאֱלֹהִים – *Than all gods*: Rabbi Yishmael taught: There was not a single religion whose faith Reuel, i.e., Yitro, had not considered and whose gods he had not worshipped in his earlier years. But eventually he was forced

to declare: *The Lord is greater than all gods*, a realization that led the man to convert and to thank the Holy One, blessed be He, for His efforts on Israel’s behalf. (3:11)

יב זָדוּ עֲלֵיהֶם: וַיִּקָּח יִתְרוֹ חֲתָן מֹשֶׁה עִלָּה וּזְבָחִים לַאלֹהִים  
 וַיָּבֵא אֶהָרֹן וְכָל זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֶאֱכֹל-לֶחֶם עִם-חֲתָן מֹשֶׁה  
 יג לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים: וַיְהִי מִמַּחֲרַת וַיָּשָׁב מֹשֶׁה לְשַׁפֵּט אֶת-הָעָם  
 יד וַיַּעֲמֵד הָעָם עַל-מֹשֶׁה מִן-הַבֹּקֶר עַד-הָעֶרֶב: וַיֵּרָא חֲתָן  
 מֹשֶׁה אֶת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר-הוּא עֹשֶׂה לָעָם וַיֹּאמֶר מִה-הַדְּבָר  
 הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה עֹשֶׂה לָעָם מִדּוּעַ אַתָּה יוֹשֵׁב לְבִדּוּךְ וְכָל-  
 טו הָעָם נֹצֵב עֲלֶיךָ מִן-בֹּקֶר עַד-עֶרֶב: וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה לְחַתְנִי

## VERSE 12

## SIFREI ZUTA

לַיִתְרוֹ – *Aharon and all the elders of Israel came: Rabbi Yosei taught: Yitro's name was originally Reuel, indicating that he was a companion [rea] to God. Thus the verse*

*states: And Aharon and all the elders of Israel came to break bread with Moshe's father-in-law before God. (10:29)*

## TALMUD BAVLI

לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים – *Before God: Did the company really eat their meal before God rather than before Moshe? What the verse teaches is that*

*whenever a person participates in a meal with a Torah scholar, it is as if he absorbs the glory of the Divine Presence. (Berakhot 64a)*

## BEMIDBAR RABBA

עִלָּה וּזְבָחִים לַאלֹהִים – *A burnt offering and sacrifices to God: Rabbi Elazar and Rabbi Yosei bar Hanina disputed the timing of this episode. One believed that Yitro arrived at the Israelite camp before the giving of the Torah, while the other claimed that he only came after the Torah was given. Rabbi Hama taught in the name of Rabbi Hanina: According to the approach that Yitro came before the Torah was given, we must accept the position that Noahides [committed gentiles] would offer peace*

*offerings [whose meat is eaten, and not only burnt offerings, which are consumed whole on the altar; the assumption is that since our verse mentions “sacrifices” apart from burnt offerings, this must refer to peace offerings]. But if Yitro did in fact arrive after the Torah had been given [and offered these sacrifices as part of the sacrificial rites of Israel ordained at Sinai], we can entertain the position that Noahides would only ever offer burnt offerings. (Naso 13:2)*

## VERSE 13

## MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON

וַיְהִי מִמַּחֲרַת – *The next day: This was the day after Yom Kippur [when Moshe gave Israel the second set of tablets; now Moshe could begin*

*to judge the people according to the newly given laws of the Torah].*

## TALMUD BAVLI

מִן-הַבֹּקֶר עַד-הָעֶרֶב – *From morning to evening: Could Moshe really have sat and judged the*

*people for the entire day? When would he have had time to study the Torah? Rather, the*



12 against others.” Then Yitro brought a burnt offering and sacrific-  
 13 es to God. And Aharon and all the elders of Israel came  
 14 to break bread with Moshe’s father-in-law before God. The  
 next day Moshe sat to serve the people as judge. From morn-  
 15 ing to evening the people stood before him. When Moshe’s father-  
 in-law saw everything Moshe did for the people, he asked,  
 “What is this that you do for the people? Why do you sit alone  
 while all the people stand over you from morning to evening?”  
 “The people come to me to inquire of God,” Moshe replied.

\_\_\_\_\_ TALMUD BAVLI (cont.) \_\_\_\_\_

verse teaches that when a judge judges truth-  
 fully and accurately even for a single hour,  
 the text assigns him credit as if he has part-  
 nered with the Holy One, blessed be He, in  
 the creation of the world. For our verse states:

*From morning to evening the people stood be-  
 fore him, while an earlier verse [concerning  
 the creation] states: And there was evening  
 and there was morning, one day (Genesis 1:5).  
 (Shabbat 10a)*

\_\_\_\_\_ LEKAH TOV \_\_\_\_\_

וַיְהִי מִמָּחָרֶת – *The next day:* This was the day  
 after the meal described in the previous verse.  
 וַיֹּשֶׁב מֹשֶׁה לְשִׁפְטֵי אֶת־הָעָם – *Moshe sat to serve  
 the people as judge:* What sort of lawsuits did  
 the people have? The mixed multitudes of  
 gentiles who had left Egypt with Israel, sued  
 the Israelites for some of the plunder they took

from the Egyptians. וַיַּעֲמֵד הָעָם עַל־מֹשֶׁה – *The  
 people stood before Moshe:* We learn from this  
 verse that parties in a law case must stand be-  
 fore their judges. The court can give them per-  
 mission to sit down, but it may not allow one  
 party to sit while the other remains standing.

\_\_\_\_\_ VERSE 14 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON \_\_\_\_\_

כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־הוּא עֹשֶׂה – *Everything Moshe did:*  
 Said Yitro to Moshe: The way you sit before the  
 people makes you seem like a king receiving

his subjects. Why do you sit alone while the  
 entire nation stands before you?

\_\_\_\_\_ SEKHEL TOV \_\_\_\_\_

כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־הוּא עֹשֶׂה – *Everything Moshe did:*  
 Yitro pointed out to his son-in-law that be-  
 cause he spent his entire day occupied with  
 judging the nation, he had no time to study

Torah. Furthermore, the task he had under-  
 taken, to listen to and handle all of Israel’s  
 problems, was exhausting and surely taxed  
 his mind.

\_\_\_\_\_ VERSE 15 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ MIDRASH SHMUEL \_\_\_\_\_

לְדַרְשׁ אֱלֹהִים – *To inquire of God:* Rabbi  
 Yehoshua of Sikhnin taught in the name of  
 Rabbi Levi: The Holy One, blessed be He, said to  
 Moshe: You boast of Torah knowledge, saying:  
*The people come to me to inquire of God. You will*

yet see how you will be required to come to Me  
 to seek the law. Thus a later verse states: *And  
 when Moshe went later into the Tent of Meeting  
 to speak with Him, he heard the voice speaking to  
 him from on the covering (Numbers 7:89). (9:7)*

כִּי־יָבֹא אֵלַי הָעַם לְדַרְשׁ אֱלֹהִים: כִּי־יִהְיֶה לָהֶם דְּבַר  
 בָּא אֵלַי וְשִׁפְטֹתַי בֵּין אִישׁ וּבֵין רֵעֵהוּ וְהוֹדַעְתִּי אֶת־חֻקֵּי  
 הָאֱלֹהִים וְאֶת־תּוֹרֹתַי: וַיֹּאמֶר חֲתָן מֹשֶׁה אֵלָיו לֹא־טוֹב  
 הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה עֹשֶׂה: נָכַל תִּבְלָל גַּם־אַתָּה גַּם־הָעַם הַזֶּה  
 אֲשֶׁר עִמָּךְ כִּי־כַבֵּד מִמֶּךָ הַדְּבָר לֹא־תוּכַל עֲשׂוֹהוּ לְבַדְּךָ:  
 עֲתָה שָׁמַע בְּקֻלִּי אֵינְעֲצֹךְ וַיְהִי אֱלֹהִים עִמָּךְ הִיָּה אַתָּה לְעַם

## SEKHEL TOV

לְדַרְשׁ אֱלֹהִים – *To inquire of God*: The people come to me to hear words of reproach and

warnings that the Holy One, blessed be He, has conveyed to me.

## VERSE 16

## MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON

כִּי־יִהְיֶה לָהֶם דְּבַר – *When they have a dispute*: [Literally, “when they have a matter.”] They come to pose questions regarding matters of impurity and purity. וְשִׁפְטֹתַי בֵּין אִישׁ וּבֵין רֵעֵהוּ – *And I judge between one neighbor and another*: I adjudicate matters that can have no compromise position, as well as quarrels which can be settled through mutual accommodation. In the latter cases, the disputants can go home as friends [*re'im*].

אֶת־חֻקֵּי הָאֱלֹהִים וְאֶת־תּוֹרֹתַי – *God’s laws and teachings*: According to Rabbi Yehoshua, “laws” [*hukkim*] refers to God’s decrees [i.e., statutes whose rationales are not immediately apparent], while “teachings” [*torot*] connotes laws [the purposes of which are intuitive]. According to Rabbi Elazar HaModa’i, “laws” refers to rules prohibiting illicit sexual unions, and “teachings” indicates decrees.

## VERSE 17

## MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON

וַיֹּאמֶר חֲתָן מֹשֶׁה אֵלָיו – *Moshe’s father-in-law said to him*: Yitro was so respected that he is given credit for an entire Torah passage, that which deals with the appointment of Israel’s judges. Now considering that the Holy One, blessed be He, well knew that establishing a court system was a reasonable step in the nation’s development, why did He not instruct Moshe to arrange the matter before Yitro offered his advice? God suppressed such a

command in order to allow Yitro to present his idea and thereby garner Moshe’s and the Israelites’ respect. Everyone would then say that Yitro must be a great man, since the Holy One, blessed be He, agreed to his plan! For his part, Yitro offered his suggestion only tentatively, saying that his scheme should really only be adopted if the Holy One, blessed be He, agreed that it was worthwhile. This is why he said: *If you do this, and God so commands* (18:23).

## LEKAH TOV

וַיֹּאמֶר חֲתָן מֹשֶׁה אֵלָיו – *Moshe’s father-in-law said to him*: Yitro’s words in this verse teach that a polite person speaks in a well-mannered

way, for he said: *What you are doing is not good* [while he could have said: “What you are doing is bad”].

16 “When they have a dispute, they come to me and I judge between one neighbor and another, and I make God’s laws and  
 17 teachings known.” Moshe’s father-in-law said to him, “What  
 18 you are doing is not good. You will be worn away, and this  
 19 people along with you. It is too heavy a burden for you. You  
 cannot carry it alone. Now listen to me, let me advise you; and

VERSE 18

MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON

נָבֵל תִּבֹּל גַּם־אֶתָּהּ – *You will be worn away:* Rabbi Yehoshua taught: Yitro warned Moshe that the people would start to disrespect him and take advantage of him. Whereas according to Rabbi Elazar the statement suggests Moshe would become worn out and dried up like the autumn leaves on a fig tree. We find similar phrasing in the verse *All its hosts will wither away [yibbol] as leaves wither and fall from the vine, like a fig that falls too soon* (Isaiah 34:4). גַּם־אֶתָּהּ – *You:* [Literally, “and you.”] The term “you” refers to Moshe, while the word “and” connotes Aharon. גַּם־הָעָם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר עִמָּךְ – *And this people*

*along with you:* Rabbi Yehoshua taught: This means that even if the seventy elders [see Numbers 11:16] assisted Moshe, they would be quickly overwhelmed. According to Rabbi Elazar HaModa’i, Yitro also included Nadav and Avihu among those who would not be up to the task of constantly settling the Israelites’ problems. כִּי־כָבֵד מִמְּךָ הַדָּבָר – *It is too heavy a burden for you:* Said Yitro to Moshe: Have a look at this beam. When it is saturated with water, it is much too heavy for a single person to carry. But when three or four men band together, they can shoulder it. Similarly, this *is too heavy a burden for you. You cannot carry it alone.*

SEKHEL TOV

גַּם־הָעָם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר עִמָּךְ – *And this people along with you:* Yitro here referred to the seventy elders, as well as to Nadav and Avihu. These men were not yet qualified judges, and they still served as Moshe’s students and followed his instructions.

For a disciple still learning jurisprudence from his mentor is himself not authorized to rule, and so too did these individuals lack permission to judge on their own, for they had not been appointed to a position of responsibility.

VERSE 19

MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON

וַיְהִי אֵלֶיהֶם עִמָּךְ – *And may God be with you:* If God agrees with this plan then you will find yourself able to endure; if God disapproves of this idea you will not be able to manage. הֲיִיה אֶתָּה לְעָם מוֹלֵה אֱלֹהִים – *You*

*speak for the people before God:* You shall be to the people a vessel holding God’s words. וְהִבֵּאתָ אֶתָּה אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים אֲלֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים – *And bring their concerns to Him:* And whatever you hear, you shall teach the people.

SHEMOT RABBA

עַתָּה שְׁמַע בְּקוֹלִי אֵינְךָ – *Now listen to me, let me advise you:* The verse which states: *Rebuke one who has understanding, and he will gain knowledge* (Proverbs 19:25), refers to Moshe.

For when Yitro saw him sitting all day and judging the people of Israel, he said to him: *Why do sit alone.... You will be worn away* (18:14, 18). His father-in-law continued: “Do not

מוֹל הָאֱלֹהִים וְהִבֵּאת אֶתְּךָ אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים:  
 וְהִזְהַרְתָּ אִתָּהֶם אֶת־הַחֻקִּים וְאֶת־הַתּוֹרֹת וְהוֹדַעְתָּ לָהֶם<sup>כ</sup>  
 אֶת־הַדֶּרֶךְ יִלְכוּ בָּהּ וְאֶת־הַמַּעֲשֵׂה אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשׂוּן: וְאֶתְּךָ<sup>כא</sup>  
 תַּחֲזוּהוּ מִכָּל־הָעַם אֲנָשֵׁי־חַיִּיל יִרְאוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲנָשֵׁי אֲמַת

## SHEMOT RABBA (cont.)

act on my advice alone, but be sure to ask the Holy One, blessed be He, what He thinks.” Thus

the verse states: *Now listen to me, let me advise you; and may God be with you.* (Yitro 27:6)

## VERSE 20

## MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON

וְאֶת־הַחֻקִּים וְאֶת־הַתּוֹרֹת – *With His precepts and laws:* According to Rabbi Yehoshua, “precepts” [*hukkim*] are statutes whose reasons are obscure, while “laws” [*torot*] refers to rational directives. Whereas Rabbi Elazar HaModa’i taught: *Hukkim* refers to forbidden sexual unions, as a later verse states: *Therefore shall you keep my ordinance, that you commit not any one of these abominable customs [hukkot] which were practiced before you* (Leviticus 18:30), and *torot* refers to statutes whose

reasons are unclear. אֶת־הַדֶּרֶךְ יִלְכוּ בָּהּ – *The path they are to walk:* This too refers to laws whose rationales are unknowable, which is why another verse must emphasize: *You shall walk in all the ways which the LORD your God has commanded you* [Deuteronomy 5:30; that is, even if you do not know their reasoning]. וְאֶת־הַמַּעֲשֵׂה אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשׂוּן – *And the way they must act:* This refers to good deeds; so teaches Rabbi Yehoshua.

## TALMUD BAVLI

אֶת־הַדֶּרֶךְ יִלְכוּ בָּהּ – *The path they are to walk:* [Literally, “the path they are to walk on.”] Rav Yosef learned: The phrase “make known to them” refers to teaching the Israelites how to earn a livelihood; “the path” means that Moshe should guide the people in practicing acts of righteousness; “they are to walk” alludes

to the necessity of visiting the sick; the word “on” [*vah*] teaches that people must bury their dead; “and the way” means that the nation should exercise strict justice when called for; “they must act” means that on occasion courts should allow judgments that bend the letter of the law. (Bava Metzia 30b)

## LEKAH TOV

וְהִזְהַרְתָּ אִתָּהֶם – *And you must acquaint them:* Yitro here advises Moshe to teach Israel the Ten Commandments. This is the allusion hiding in the superfluous letter *heh* at the end of the word *vehizharta*, and that in the middle

of the word *ethem* [usually *otam*. The numerical value of the letter *heh* is five, and hence the two superfluous letters together hint at the number ten.]

## MIDRASH AGGADA

אֶת־הַחֻקִּים – *His precepts:* By using the world “precepts” [*hukkim*], Yitro advised Moshe to

teach Israel the commandments governing the Sabbath; the word “laws” [*torot*] refers to

may God be with you. You speak for the people before God,  
 20 and bring their concerns to Him. And you must acquaint them  
 with His precepts and laws, and make known to them the  
 21 path they are to walk and the way they must act. You, as well,  
 must seek out among the people, capable men – God-fearing,

MIDRASH AGGADA (cont.)

the laws of permitted and prohibited actions and items, as the verse states: *This is the law [torah]: when a man dies in a tent, all that come into the tent, and all that is in the tent, shall be unclean seven days* (Numbers 19:14). And what

is the connection between the term *torah* and the case of a person dying? We learn from here that only somebody who kills himself [metaphorically] in the pursuit of Torah study will find success in that area.

VERSE 21

MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON

תְּחִזֶּה בְּכָל־הָעָם – *Seek out among the people:* Rabbi Yehoshua taught: Moshe was to use the power of prophecy to divine who fit the specified criteria. Rabbi Elazar HaModa'i said:

Moshe used the strength of his intellect in interviewing these men to look into their hearts, as kings are capable of doing.

MIDRASH TANNA'IM DEVARIM

אֲנֹשֵׁי־חַיִל יִרְאֵי אֱלֹהִים – *Capable men – God-fearing:* When Yitro suggested to Moshe that he sought outstanding judges, he listed seven attributes that Moshe was to look for. Alas, the leader was only able to find men with three of the necessary traits: capable, God-fearing, and trustworthy. Still, these are the seven characteristics that every judge should possess, even if he sits merely on a panel of three justices [a minor court that hears only monetary cases]: wisdom, fear of God, humility, indifference to personal gain, love of truth, fondness for people, and a fine reputation. How do we know that judges must be wise? From the verse: *So I took the chief of your tribes, wise men, and known* (Deuteronomy 1:15). We know that justices must fear God from the verse *You must seek out among the people, capable men – God-fearing* (Exodus 18:21). That they must be modest we learn from Moshe, about whom the verse states: *And the man Moshe was the most modest person ever to walk the face of the earth* (Numbers 12:3). Judges must despise money.

We know this is true from Yitro's advice to select people who "despise corruption" (Exodus 18:21). But not only must judges be impervious to bribery, they should care little for the money they already own and not be obsessed about protecting it or amassing great amounts of wealth. This same verse shows us that judges must be "trustworthy men" [literally, "men of truth"], meaning men who are committed to unearthing the truth for its own sake and who revile injustice. The phrase "chief of your tribes and known" (Deuteronomy 1:15) shows that judges must be personable. They demonstrate their love of people by acting generously and humbly toward them, they are friendly, and all of their business transactions are conducted pleasantly. Finally, the phrase "capable men" [*anshei hayil*] suggests that judges must possess solid reputations. They should be well-known for being industrious in observing the commandments, as masters of their own desires, and as being of impeccable character. Finally, judges must be brave enough to rescue

שְׁנָאֵי בַצַּע וְשִׁמְתָּ עֲלֵהֶם שָׂרֵי אֲלָפִים שָׂרֵי מֵאוֹת שָׂרֵי  
 חֲמִשִּׁים וְשָׂרֵי עֶשְׂרֹת: וְשִׁפְטוּ אֶת־הָעָם בְּכֹל־עֵת וְהָיָה  
 כָּל־הַדָּבָר הַגָּדוֹל יָבִיאוּ אֵלַיךָ וְכֹל־הַדָּבָר הַקָּטָן יִשְׁפְטוּ־  
 הֵם וְהִקְלָ מֵעַלְיֶיךָ וְנִשְׂאוּ אִתָּךְ: אִם אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה תַּעֲשֶׂה  
 וְצִוְךָ אֱלֹהִים וְיָבִילֶת עַמּוֹד וְגַם כָּל־הָעָם הַזֶּה עַל־מִקְמוֹ יָבִאוּ

## MIDRASH TANNA'IM DEVARIM (cont.)

victims of abuse and exploitation. This attribute of compassion for the weak is also learned from Moshe, as the verse states: *Shepherds arrived*

*and started to drive the young women away. But Moshe stood up to defend them, and then water their flock (2:17).* (1:15)

## VERSE 22

## MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON

וְשִׁפְטוּ אֶת־הָעָם בְּכֹל־עֵת – *Serve as daily judges for the people:* Rabbi Yehoshua taught: the judges should be otherwise unemployed, so that they will always be available to hear the people's complaints. Rabbi Elazar HaModa'i taught: Yes, being unoccupied is important for judges, but it is also critical that they be learned in the Torah so that they may issue proper rulings for Israel. כָּל־הַדָּבָר הַגָּדוֹל יָבִיאוּ אֵלַיךָ – *Let them bring the major cases to you:* [The phrase *hadavar hagadol* – “major cases” – can also be interpreted as meaning “cases of important

people.”] Does the verse mean that weighty issues should be brought to Moshe for judgment, while the appointed judges should handle the less significant problems? Perhaps it suggests that cases involving important personages should be tried by Moshe, while disputes that trouble the common folk would be heard by the lower courts. A subsequent verse resolves this question, for when the plan is executed, the text states that *any major case [hadavar hakasheh] they brought to Moshe* [18:26; this phrasing is unambiguous].

## TALMUD BAVLI

וְנִשְׂאוּ אִתָּךְ – *And bear it together with you:* The goal was for Moshe to judge the people along with the justices, for the verse states: *They will bear it together with you.* According to Rabbi

Yehuda, the phrase “with you” implies that the judges had to be like Moshe [and be of noble lineage]. (Sanhedrin 17a)

## VERSE 23

## MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON

וְצִוְךָ אֱלֹהִים וְיָבִילֶת עַמּוֹד – *And God so commands, then you will endure:* Said Yitro to Moshe: Go and consult with God – if He approves of my plan, you should implement it, for then you will be able to manage the burden of judging Israel. However, if God disapproves of my idea, you will surely be unable

to handle the task, since even God believes that even such assistance will not help you. וְגַם כָּל־הָעָם הַזֶּה – *And all these people:* Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, and all the elders of Israel, who until this point had also struggled to deal with the caseload, would be able to go home if they were replaced by an extensive court

trustworthy men, who despise corruption; and appoint them over the people as leaders of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and  
 22 tens. Have them serve as daily judges for the people; let them bring the major cases to you, but judge the minor ones themselves. In this way they will lighten your load, and bear it together  
 23 with you. If you do this, and God so commands, then you will endure, and all these people will be able to go home in

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 MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON (cont.)
 

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system. Rabbi Simai taught: One might think that when a judge adjudicates correctly and truthfully, he provokes jealousy among people [since the disputant who had exploited his fellow is now forced to reimburse him]. In reality, however, a carefully considered judgment is critical to resolving disputes and making peace between the quarreling parties, as the verse states: *These are the things that you shall do: Speak every man the truth to his neighbor; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates* (Zechariah 8:16). Now it is clear that the one who is awarded damages in a case is content, for his grievance has been vindicated, but why should the party who has to pay be at peace as well? Because he too will eventually realize that justice has been achieved, as the verse states: *And all these people will be able to go home in peace*. And how do we know that the satisfaction that the plaintiff and the defendant feel will also extend to rest of the nation? From the verse *That he may judge Your people with righteousness, and Your poor with justice. Let the mountains bring peace to the people, and the hills, by righteousness* [Psalms 72:2–3; i.e., by executing justice, the court assures that peace spreads throughout the

land]. And such contentment will be granted even to the animals and beasts of the field, as the verse states: *But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.... And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid.... They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea* (Isaiah 11:4–9). And “knowledge” [de’a] in this verse refers to justice, as Yirmeyahu said to Shalum son of Yoshiyahu [king of Yehuda]: *Shall you reign, because you do compete in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice, and then it was well with him? He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him: was not this to know [hadaat] Me?* (Jeremiah 22:15–16). How powerful is true justice! For he who despises fairness will never be healed from his wounds, as the verse states: *Shall even one that hates right govern [yaḥavosh]? (II Kings 34:17) – The term yaḥavosh connotes healing, as in the verse He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up [umḥabbesh] their wounds* (Psalms 147:3).

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 SEKHEL TOV
 

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וְיִכָּלֵת עִמָּךְ – *Then you will endure*: [Literally, “you will be able to stand.”] If you free yourself from continuous judging, then you will be available to hear the commandments that the Divine Presence issues you. You will be

able to stand before the Holy One, blessed be He, as in the verse *As the LORD lives, before whom I stand [amadti]* (II Kings 5:16). We learn from here that when a person is engaged in judgment he may not sit while deliberating.

בְּשָׁלוֹם: וַיִּשְׁמַע מֹשֶׁה לְקוֹל חֲתָנּוֹ וַיַּעַשׂ כֹּל אֲשֶׁר אָמַר: שְׁלִישִׁי  
 כה וַיִּבְחַר מֹשֶׁה אֲנָשִׁי־חֵיל מִכָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָם רָאשִׁים  
 עַל־הָעַם שְׂרֵי אֲלָפִים שְׂרֵי מֵאוֹת שְׂרֵי חֲמִשִּׁים וְשְׂרֵי  
 כב עֶשְׂרֹת: וַשְּׁפֹטוּ אֶת־הָעַם בְּכָל־עֵת אֶת־הַדְּבָר הַקָּשֶׁה  
 כב יְבִיאוּן אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְכָל־הַדְּבָר הַקָּטָן יִשְׁפֹּטוּ הֵם: וַיִּשְׁלַח  
 מֹשֶׁה אֶת־חֲתָנּוֹ וַיֵּלֶךְ לוֹ אֶל־אֲרָצוֹ:

## VERSE 24

## MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON

וַיַּעַשׂ כֹּל אֲשֶׁר אָמַר – *And did all that he said:* According to Rabbi Yehoshua, this means that he followed Yitro's advice to the letter. According

to Rabbi Elazar HaModa'i, this phrase signifies that Moshe waited for God's approval of the plan, and then obeyed His instructions.

## VERSE 25

## MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON

וַיִּבְחַר מֹשֶׁה אֲנָשִׁי־חֵיל – *Moshe chose capable men:* Moshe appointed judges over Israel and ordered them to suffer the travails of public service, as a later verse states: *And I charged your judges at that time, saying, Hear the causes between your brethren, and judge righteously*

*between every man and his brother, and the stranger that is with him* (Deuteronomy 1:16). Simultaneously, Moshe commanded the people to treat their judges respectfully, as the verse states: *And I commanded you at that time all the things which you should do* (Deuteronomy 1:18).

## LEKAH TOV

וַיִּבְחַר מֹשֶׁה אֲנָשִׁי־חֵיל – *Moshe chose capable men:* This verse abridges the list of qualifications that Moshe's appointees possessed. For when the text states that these men were "capable," it means that they were honest in

financial matters, that they were possessed with a deep reverence of God, and that they were strict adherents of the Torah's commandments.

## VERSE 26

## MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON

אֶת־הַדְּבָר הַקָּשֶׁה – *Any major case:* Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to Moshe: Do you really think you are capable of adjudicating difficult matters? Look, the daughters of Tzelofhad put a request to you [see Numbers 27:1–4]

that any schoolchild could have answered, and yet you were stymied by their demand! Instead of handily resolving the case, we read that *Moshe brought their cause before the Lord* (Numbers 27:5).

## LEKAH TOV

וַשְּׁפֹטוּ אֶת־הָעַם בְּכָל־עֵת – *They judged the people every day:* [Literally, "at all times."] Because the judges were not otherwise employed, they

were always available to sit in judgment of their compatriots. Now does the verse mean that the judges heard cases even at night? No, for a later