

A SOCIETY TO BE PROUD OF

by Rabbi Berel Wein

In the search for leadership for the Jews in the desert, Yitro advises Moshe to find people of strength and wealth who "hate corruption." In the generation of Moshe, those people were hard to find. And apparently, the search for them has not become more fruitful or easier over the centuries. We are witness to daily reports of alleged corruption in high office throughout the general world as well as the Jewish world. In fact, corruption has almost become so acceptable in political life everywhere, that it is only criminal corruption that warrants attention and condemnation. But the difficult truth is that personal corruption of public figures corrupts the entire society and leads to potentially disastrous communal situations.

You will notice that Yitro did not instruct Moshe to find people who themselves were not corrupt. He demanded instead that Moshe somehow find people who hated corruption. The standard demanded from public officials is hatred - complete intolerance - of corruption. Because if one does not hate corruption, eventually there will arise an acceptance of corruption in the public sector and even if the officials are not guilty of criminal corruption the society will be surely corrupted. Moshe was unable to find people who met the standards set by Yitro. He settled therefore for people of independent strength and means, financially secure and of strong moral character. Perhaps as long as Moshe is the leader of Israel, his presence guarantees that the official society of Israel a corruption-free environment. But Moshe is not always and therefore the necessity to continually search for haters of corruption is always relevant and present.

Moshe also appoints a large number of judges/counselors for Israel. Almost one-sixth of the possible male population between the ages of twenty to sixty is coopted into the official civil service. In today's terms, that may or may not be a large number. But the important lesson here is that there were judges/counselors who were responsible for a relatively small number of people, even for only fifty people. Judges who know their customers, so to speak, who are not overloaded by enormous case loads, who can see the individual human being and not just the sterile law, are the ones who can provide stability and direction in the life of society. A judiciary that is separated from its constituency and that has its own agenda and deals only with law and not with people will rapidly lose respect and confidence in the society that it is supposed to serve. How to achieve such an understanding, responsive and accepted judiciary is one of the main social problems facing Israeli society today.

Finally, this week's parsha teaches us that all morality stems from the standards and

commandments of our Creator. Man may logically understand that it is evil to murder and steal (the Talmud intimates that moral laws could be derived by observing nature and the animal kingdom) but unless there is an inner discipline created, man will continue to murder and steal no matter how many police are enlisted and no matter how many jails are built. It is the voice of Sinai that has to find echo within the hearts and minds of individuals. If it does so, then society has far greater security and stability than any coercive outside force can provide. This matter of belief, of self-control and perspective, is the key to creating a better environment for all mankind, especially for Jewish society. We must attempt to build a society that all of the generations - from Moshe and Yitro until our day - will be proud of.

Shabat Shalom.

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