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We are Moseses and Jethros

Exodus 18 provides an insight into the early troubles that Moses, as the leader of the Israelites, has endured, is enduring and will need to endure, and how his father-in-law Jethro gives sound advice to the servant of the Lord, Moses.

The chapter opens with the introduction of Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, Father of Zipporah, the Midianite high priest. Interestingly, Jethro is accompanied by Moses' wife Zipporah, and her sons Gershon and Eliezer (Exo 18:1-4). The Bible does not give the reader the reasoning behind Zipporah's previous departure, the Rabbis probably have many midrashic stories that fill in the gap, ranging from Moses's concern for the safety of his family during the Exodus events, to a relational breakdown between husband and wife. In the latter case, Jethro would be playing the role of a reconciler, bringing together the family again, yet this remains speculative.

The narrator follows with Jethro's exchange with Moses, where he learns of the event that happened in Mizraim not too long ago (Exo 18:8). Jethro acknowledges God's greatness over all other gods and follows with gives a burnt offering (Exo 18:9-10). The following

morning, multitudes gathered before Moses' office, awaiting his judgement on all affairs from small to large, Moses was probably overwhelmed by 9:15 am. Witnessing his Son-in-law's Sisyphean tasks, Jethro gives advice to Moses, urging him to offload his duties by empowering honourable men as leaders of the people(Exo 18:13-23). These leaders, in turn, will assist Moses in handling his smaller tasks, that way Moses can focus on handling more significant, or more challenging tasks. Moses follows suit with the advice of his Father-in-law and creates a hieratical system to govern the Israelites (Exo 18:24-26).

Not being in the situation, Jethro was able to acknowledge that what Moses is enduring is not a healthy situation, sooner or later he would burn out. As an old Chinese saying goes: "The player is lost, the spectator is clear", in this pericope, Moses is lost, his vision blurred by his daily tasks, and he forgets a leader's most important job is to create more leaders. However, it is Jethro, an outsider, that has a clear picture of the situation and is able to give timely advice to help his son-in-law to avoid the inevitable burnout.

I believe this story has two-fold meaning for a modern reader. At times, we can be like Moses, lost in the small things that slowly burden our shoulders and make each step forward ever so harder, but it is important to learn to offload our burdens and focus on the bigger picture. Other times we can be like Jethro, friends around us may be faced with tasks that are weighing them down, and we might be in the position to provide them with timely advice and helps them refocus. As Christians, and leaders, we are both Moseses and Jethros, we need help from others

and we can help others, only that way we can avoid being burnt out on our long journey which is called faith.