

Text Study – Choosing Leaders

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The Blessing Before Study

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ הַמֶּלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְעִסֵּק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה.

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech haolam
asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu la'asok b'divrei Torah*

Praised are You Adonai, Ruler of the universe,
Who sanctifies us with mitzvot and commands us
to engage in the study of Torah.

Please note that God's Hebrew name appears on this page. As a sign of respect, instead of discarding it after use you may prefer to store it in a geniza—a place where printed materials containing God's name and old ritual objects are collected in preparation for ritual burial.

Texts to Read

Read these texts and then answer the questions that follow. You should break into small groups to discuss the texts and questions.

Text 1: Parashat Yitro, Exodus 18:17-23

But Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing you are doing is not right; you will surely wear yourself out, and these people as well. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. Now listen to me. I will give you counsel, and God be with you! You represent the people before God: you bring the disputes before God, and enjoin upon them the laws and the teachings, and make known to them the way they are to go and the practices they are to follow. You shall also seek out from among all the people capable men who fear God, trustworthy men who spurn ill-gotten gain. Set those over them as chiefs of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens, and let them judge the people at all times. Have them bring every major dispute to you, but let them decide every minor dispute themselves. Make it easier for yourself by letting them share the burden with you."

Text 2: *Parshat S'hlach*, Numbers 13: 1-2, 17-20

The Lord spoke to Moses saying, “Send thou men (*anashim*) to scout the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelite people; send one man from each of their ancestral tribes, each one of them a chieftan among them”...When Moses sent them to scout the land of Canaan, he said to them, “Go up there into the Negeb and on into the hill country, and see what kind of country it is, Are the people who dwell in it strong or weak, few or many? Is the country in which they dwell good or bad? Are the towns they live in open or fortified? Is the soil rich or poor? Is it wooded or not? And take pains to bring back some of the fruit of the land.”

Text 3: Joshua 2:1

Joshua, son of Nun, secretly sent two spies (*meraglim*)...

Discussion Questions:

1. When selecting the judges for Israel in *Parshat Yitro*, what criteria is Moses told to use by his father-in-law Jethro?
2. *Rashi* (Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzchak) comments on the Torah’s delineation of criteria (recognizing the language’s gender bias): capable men, God fearing men, men hating unjust gain. Why do you suppose it was necessary for the Torah to separate out these particular characteristics? Would it have been better for the Torah to say instead: “God fearing men”, or some other type of all encompassing description?
3. Why weren’t the “Elders” of the people mentioned in Text 1??
4. Compare the selection process of the Judges in Text 1 with the selection process for the scouts in *Parshat S'hlach* in Text 2. Why is Moses told by God to select men who were “chieftans” from each of the twelve tribes? What kind of task were they assigned to do?
5. In the Haftorah for *Parshat S'hlach*, Joshua sends professional spies (*meraglim*) to scout the city of Jericho for conquest. Compare this task and the selection process with the selection process for the scouts (by Moses) and the Judges (as suggested by his father-in-law Jethro). Were the men sent by Moses professional spies (the Torah does not call them *meraglim*)?
6. As we begin to select people, what criteria should we use? How do the texts guide us in this process? What lessons can we learn from the selected texts?