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Years ago, back when we lived in Alabama, our shul used to host summer Bible schools that would come on a tour of the synagogue. It was a great form of community outreach and I loved the questions the kids, and their adult leaders, would ask. So one day a teacher said to me, "Rabbi, I want to make sure I have this kosher thing straight." OK, I said. He said, "It applies to animals - you can only eat some." I said yes, in fact, very few - only about 6% of all animals are fit for Jews to eat." "...And you can only eat certain fish, right?" "That's correct", I said. "And what about the other foods", he asked. Like what? "Like kosher vegetables!" I said there is no such thing as a kosher vegetable -- we eat all of them. "Oh yeah", he said, "then what about kosher pickles?!" So I explained that that just had to do with delis that served kosher meat and the pickles they used, and that's how they became known as "kosher pickles". "But that's the one exception", I said. "Oh, yeah", he asked, "then what about kosher salt?!"

And I share this story with you because it reminds us that sometimes we are so close to a subject that we often overlook the obvious questions. This week's Torah portion, one of the most important in the whole Torah-- the Torah portion of the Revelation at Sinai and the 10 commandments -- is actually called, "Yitro". Why? Because Yitro was the one who told Moses, before the Torah was even given, that what he was doing was bad for the Jewish People. You see Moshe used to sit, as the parsha tells us, all day and all night patiently advising every person who brought a problem to him. People would have to stand in line just to get a word with Moses. And Jethro - the Midianite Priest - says that this is a really bad idea. He tells Moses that he should empower lots of other lesser judges to hear all the smaller problems. And of course that was a system that made sense - we still use it today. But the really obvious question, which I never really thought about until it was asked of me this week is: Why didn't Moses or Aaron think of this themselves? It's such an important idea, why didn't they think of it?

I read an interesting article this week that may shed some light on this. Researchers have found that babies who are encouraged to eat with their hands, (as opposed to being spoon fed) - babies that are encouraged to pick up food and put it in their own mouths are far less likely to be obese as they grow older. But what is more... they are also far more likely to show signs of independence and a willingness to

take the risks necessary to gain vital life skills than children who are spoon fed for the same length of time. The kids who had to feed themselves were more likely to thrive than those who were spoon fed. Now of course you can understand why we would want to spoon feed our kids. It's not as messy - a whole lot more food is going to get in their mouths this way, and if they use their hands a whole lot more is going to get on the floor. What is more, if the goal is for them to get the nutrition, spoon-feeding is far more efficient. So naturally, we would assume that spoon feeding is better for little kids. But that's not the case.

Yitro saw what Moshe was doing and he said, "I understand why you want to spoon feed these people. They are new at this freedom stuff - they don't know how to solve their own problems. You want to help them, I understand that..." But you guys are too close; you can't see what you are really doing. But if you really want to help them, you'll empower them to make decisions for themselves and to then help one another. Don't worry, they'll still need you, Moses, but it will be better if you put them down and let them walk for themselves. And he was right. They were too close to see what was really going on! He thought he was helping by solving all the people's problems himself. And Moshe at first probably could not understand this... After all, he was raised in the palace; he probably had people waiting on him hand and foot. He probably didn't have to lift a spoon or walk on the ground until he was really big. But it took someone who was not coddled as a kid, an outsider to change his mind, to help him to see that if he wanted to raise up and empower those who followed him he had to allow them to think and act for themselves, even if it meant their making mistakes. All Moshe wanted to do was help - but Yitro told him how to do that better, and that's why, in part, this portion bears his name.

Today we know that part of good parenting is letting go - kids have to learn how to think for themselves even though our impulse is to do all we can for them. But our goal should be their independence - the ability to think for themselves. We want them to learn from their mistakes, so sometimes we have to allow them to make them. I see bumper stickers that say, "My child got all A's at XYZ Elementary School", but maybe we should have a bumper sticker that says, "My Kid Learns from His Mistakes." That's a sign of emotional maturity.

...And what goes for kids also holds for us. It's a sign of emotional maturity to see mistakes as opportunities for growth. But sometimes we are too close to see that. We can't be objective about our own

lives, we need some emotional and intellectual distance. When challenges come our way, when questions, big questions, come our way we want to be spoon fed answers. I understand that. But we have to be able to take that step back and ask, "How do I grow through this?" Not just how do I GET through it - but how do I GROW through it? THAT should be the obvious question. But we have to train ourselves to ask it. We have been equipped with greater strength and resources - physical, emotional and spiritual resources, than we can ever imagine. But it's up to us to call them into action....