One of the most frustrating experiences in the world is standing in a long line at the bank while one bank teller waits on the dozen or so customers ahead of you. The frustration comes from the fact that a gang of bank tellers stands behind the counter, their teller wickets adorned with signs proclaiming 'Next Teller Please'. They stare right past you waiting for their shift to change or their break to occur. Mind you I have nothing against banks per se, they have a great deal of my money and according to my monthly statement of service charges they find almost as many ways to spend it as I do. But waiting in line for one teller to total up my deposit and hand me a receipt, while a dozen other equally trained and skilled tellers wait in the wings with seemingly nothing to do is a frustration I found more and more difficult to bare.

I guess that is why I use the ATM so much, even though I prefer handing my hard earned money over to an actual person. I just reach a point where I say, you know I'll just do this myself, I can't stand this line any longer. This was a fine solution until the other day when I discovered that the line for the machine was now almost as long as the line inside for the human teller. The frustration on the faces of my fellow card holders was clearly evident, prohibited by service charges from using another machine, and held captive by our need to get at the money we had earlier deposited. We had no place else to go, though many other places we would like to be, we just had to wait our turn in line.

The frustration we felt on that day was in a manner of speaking of biblical proportions. In this week's parsha we are introduced once againt to Jethro, Moses' father -in-law. Jethro brings with him, Moses' wife Zipporah, and his two sons Gershom and Eliezar. Moses greets them all with a warm welcome, they have a meal together, and Jethro professes his faith in Adonai. The next day Jethro goes out to see the camp and all the people. As Lauren read on Monay morning, Jethro happens upon Moses as he sits the lone judge over the whole community of Israel. Almost all of Israel, is lined up before Moses, from morning to night waiting for him to hear their case and inquire the judegment of God. Jethro is astounded at the sight he sees, there sits Moses at one end of the camp, and stretching out before him far off into the distance are thousands of Israelites waiting on line. In shock and concern Jethro asks Moses, "ÂÃÈ_›‡ÓŒ¯†Ó_‰_‰Ã„__·_¯†‰ÃÊ_Œ‰†‡_÷Œ¯†‡Ã·__‰†Ú›_Œ›‰†Ï_Ú_Ì / What is this thing you are doing Ï_Ú_Ì?" If ever the understanding of a sentence hinged on one

letter it is the lamed in the word Ï_Ú_Ì. Is Jethro asking what Moses is doing **for** the people, or is Jethro asking more pointedly what is Moses doing **to** the people.

In the Mechilta Rabbi Joshua and Rabbi Eleazar of Modi'im take up the two different sides of the argument. Rabbi Joshua understands Jethro's question as what Moses is doing for the people. He is concerned that Moses has taken on too much responsibility in his effort to be all things to the people he leads. In his view, Moses' commitment to hear every case personally is a selfless act but one that puts him at risk of exhaustion. In that condition he will be of no help to the people in these matters or in anything else. Rabbi Eleazar however understands Jethro's question to be more critical of Moses; for him the matter is what Moses is doing **to** the people, making them stand out in the hot sun in this long line waiting for him and him alone to hear their case and pronounce judgement. In his view Moses is exhausting the people, and as a result of this the people are becoming irritable, turning to one another with complaints, "Moses is taking to long too hear these cases. By the time he hears us he will be too tired to make a fair decision." Nachmanides saw further danger in what Moses was doing. The Ramba**n** explains, that the frustrations felt by the people as they waited in line present the danger that their frustration will boil over to violence and injustice should the people take the law into their own hands.

Jethro's fear is that the whole system will collapse destroying Moses as a leader and the people as a community. Jethro offers Moses his good counsel and suggests he set up what amounts to an efficient judicial system with Judges over the people in increasingly smaller and smaller districts. Moses will still represent the people before God, but he will also teach these new judges, ‡Ã_Ÿ÷ÕÈ_ÁÃÈœÏ, the laws and how properly to administer them.

This presents a new problem for the commentators, what makes a person a capable judge? The text tells us the Judges are to be God fearing, and trustworthy to the point that they will shun any attempts at bribery. Rashi suggests that such a person is wealthy, because their wealth provides them proof against flattery or favor." Nachmanides however sees it differently and our tradition seems to be best expressed in his view. For him a capable judge has nothing to do with one's material wealth, but

rather one's intellectual wealth. It is such people that Jethro wants Moses to appoint as judges, and indeed based on this criteria of wisdom and fairness judges are still appointed over Israel today.

The great contribution of this parsha is not only that it sets criteria for who shall be a judge, nor that promotes the benefits of shared leadership and decentralized government. These are all valuable lessons, and clearly important to the parsha, but the greater lesson in my opinion is the tension expressed in our struggle to understand the lamed in Ï_Ú_Ì. It is in the resolution of this tension between doing **for** the people and doing **to** the people that the greatest advancements of leadership and justice are made. Hanging in the balance between **doing for** and **doing to** we find the wisdom of Jethro's counsel in this parsha. All leadership decisions affect the leader and the people being led, and it is when we forget -- either part of that equation -- that we fail to be a good judge of what is right or what is wrong. May each of us be blessed in our communities with the wisdom of Moses, constituents with the patience of the Israelites, and insightful advisors like Jethro who can point out with we take either our own wisdom or the people's patience for granted.