

FROM THE EDITOR

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WWhat qualities make someone worthy of being a leader? Intelligence? Charisma? Confidence? Business acumen? Communication skills? Interpersonal skills? Creativity? Vision?

Actually, from a Torah perspective, none of the above. Leadership isn't about having the richest, the brightest, the most talented, or the seemingly most successful person in charge. Hashem uses very different criteria when selecting who should be placed in positions of leadership. And we need look no further for an example of this than the men who were selected for the first Sanhedrin, the council of Jewish Sages. Who were these men that Hashem chose?

When we were enslaved in Egypt, the Torah informs us that Pharaoh's taskmasters appointed officers from among the Jewish people to oversee the labour being done by their brethren. When Pharaoh stopped providing the straw to make bricks, while simultaneously keeping the previously instituted harsh quotas at the same levels, these Jewish officers had mercy on their brothers and didn't press them to continue meeting these impossible numbers. Whenever the amount produced fell short, however, the Egyptian taskmasters would beat these Jewish officers. Because these Jewish officers were willing to suffer in order that their brothers shouldn't have to, they later merited to be appointed to the first Sanhedrin.

And the midrash¹ offers similar explanations for why Moshe Rabbeinu and Dovid HaMelech (King David) were chosen to be leaders. Both were tested in the same way and, ironically, the tests had nothing to do with leading people. Once, while tending his father-in-law's flocks, Moshe famously chased after a kid that had run off, only to find it drinking thirstily from a pool of water. Rather than get angry as a result of the extra work and aggravation the kid had caused him, Moshe responded by picking up the kid, placing it on his shoulders, and carrying it back to the flock, theorising that if the kid ran away because of thirst, it must also be tired. Hashem said: You showed mercy while leading the flock of a man; surely you will tend my flock, the children of Israel.

And so too with King David – as a youth, when David tended sheep, he would divide them into three distinct groups, in order that the youngest sheep could graze first on the softest grass, after which, the oldest sheep could graze on the ordinary grass, and, only then, the young, strong sheep could graze on the tough grass that remained. Surely, this wasn't the easiest way to do things and meant extra work for the shepherd. But, seeing the level of care that David displayed, Hashem said: One who knows how to tend sheep, caring for each according to its strength, will come and tend to my nation.

What would we think of someone who introduced himself as being a shepherd? How much weight would we give to his opinions? We have a tendency to place more emphasis on what people do to earn a living and the titles they hold – doctor, lawyer, electrician, custodian, CEO, MD – than on the way people behave while earning that living. To lead the Jewish people requires extremely refined character traits, especially – as demonstrated by the above incidents – a profound level of mercy coupled with the ability to put others and their needs first, even at tremendous personal expense.

As evidenced by a meeting that took place last year between Avishai Abrahami, CEO and co-founder of Israeli tech company Wix, and Rabbi Aharon Leib Shteinman, widely regarded as the leader of Lithuanian Jewry, such leaders still exist. Following a lecture to Orthodox Jewish entrepreneurs, Abrahami was taken on a guided tour of Bnei Brak. When he and his guide arrived at Rabbi Shteinman's "tiny two-bedroom apartment, in an old regular building, with nothing but basic furniture", at around 11pm, they learned that the centenarian was already in bed. On their way out, the guide asked that the Rabbi be informed that Abrahami might be able to provide some jobs for those in Rabbi Shteinman's community. Twenty minutes later, Abrahami and the guide were called and asked to come back. Abrahami was blown away: "At Wix, I lead about 700 people. I am not religious, and don't believe in classifying religious beliefs. But, when at 11:30pm, a 101-year-old spiritual leader of millions of people gets out of bed, dresses, and ask[s] to meet with me, because I might offer a job to 30 or so of his people – I must say, that is true leadership, I have so much more to learn."

Don't we all?

ROBERT SUSSMAN, EDITOR

* Shemos Rabah 2:2

ON THE COVER: A REPRESENTATION OF A HIERARCHICAL MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE, WHEREBY A SINGLE LEADER AT THE TOP OF THE PYRAMID SHAPE IS SUPPORTED BY LAYER-AFTER-LAYER OF JUNIOR MANAGERS AND SUPPORT STAFF, FORMING A SOLID BASIS FOR SUCCESS.



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