

Shabbat Shalom Fax

Parshat Pinchas

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The Fax of Life

בס"ד

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GOOD MORNING! As the United States approaches the last few furious months of a presidential election year, the question of what innate qualities and characteristics make for a worthy leader is heavily debated.

Being an effective leader is sometimes a matter of guile and cleverness. I am reminded of the boss who always scheduled a weekly staff meeting for Friday afternoon at four-thirty. When an employee finally got up the nerve to ask why, the boss explained, "I've found that late Friday afternoon is the only time none of you want to argue with me."

In this week's Torah portion, we find some instructive lessons on leadership.

"Moses spoke to God saying, 'May the Almighty, God of the spirits of all mankind, appoint a man over the congregation, who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall take them out and who shall bring them in [...]'" (27:15-17).

This week's Torah portion includes a remarkable conversation between Moses and the Almighty about the succession plan for the leadership of the Jewish nation after Moses.

Initially, and particularly after seeing that the daughters of Tzelaftchad eventually prevail in their quest to inherit their father's share in the Holy Land (see <https://tinyurl.com/Pinchas-5783> for more on the topic), Moses is emboldened to make a request of his own; that one his children inherit his position as leader. God, however, has other plans and informs him that Joshua, Moses' faithful student and protégé, is to be rewarded for his many years of devotion to Moses and the Jewish people (see Rashi 27:16).

God then asks Moses to get Joshua on board with this plan and tells him: *"take to yourself Joshua son of Nun [...]" (27:18).*

The great Biblical commentator known as Rashi explains (ad loc) that God wanted Moses to persuade Joshua by telling him how fortunate he is to lead the children of the Almighty – the Jewish nation. But just a few verses later (27:22) when Moses actually fulfills what God asked him to do – *"Moses did as God commanded him. He took Joshua [...]"* – Rashi (ad loc) comments that Moses persuaded Joshua by informing him of the great reward in the World to Come for the leaders of the Jewish people.

God asked Moses to explain to Joshua how fortunate he was to be offered the ultimate leadership position of God's children, yet in practice Moses basically talked to him about the retirement benefits. Why did Moses seemingly alter what God had initially asked him to tell Joshua?

To understand what transpired we must first examine how Moses characterizes the leadership requirements for this job. Moses makes a specific request that the Almighty appoint someone who *"will go out in front of them and come in before them."* Moses then adds, *"who shall take them out and who shall bring them in [...]" (27:17).* This request seems a bit contradictory: Does the leader go out in front of them and come in before them, or does he take them out and bring them in?

There is a very enigmatic statement in the Talmud (*Kethubot* 105b) regarding leadership (and it's one that haunts synagogue rabbis the world over). Abaye says, "A young rabbi who is beloved by the people of his town, it is not because they think he has such fine character, it is because he doesn't properly rebuke them in matters regarding religion."

Abaye's statement is very difficult to understand: If a rabbi is beloved, it's because he isn't doing his job. However, the converse seems just as bad: If he is doing his job (criticizing his constituency), he will be despised. Surely, a hated rabbi cannot be considered to be doing his job properly either!

In this week's Torah reading Moses is teaching us the core fundamentals of leadership. Every leader has two roles; one is to lead by example, the other is to direct the people to do what needs to be done. The primary responsibility of a leader is to inspire the people to act in a certain way, i.e. a leader needs to be relatable and charismatic enough that the people will follow his lead. They need to look up to him and want to emulate him and the way he conducts his affairs. He must foster communal buy-in to help fulfill his vision for the community.

But a leader also has an important, albeit secondary, role; to make sure his followers are doing what they are supposed to be doing, even when they don't want to do the right thing. This is a much harder task, as it must come from an outside force rather than an inner motivation. A leader sometimes has to pressure and demand his constituents to do the right thing, even when they don't want to.

Moses' request from the Almighty is essentially a job description that reflects these two roles; *"he must lead them out and lead them in,"* in other words a communal leader is to an embodiment of proper behavior, to show – by example – how others should conduct their lives.

But on occasion, when they don't want to follow his lead, he must then *"bring them out and bring them in."* A true leader has to know how and when to apply the appropriate pressure to his constituents, for their own sake and for the sake of their community, so that they do the proper thing.

With this explanation we now understand the two versions of what Moses was to tell Joshua. God was telling him to persuade Joshua by extolling the privilege of inspiring the children of the Almighty through leadership. The Hebrew word Rashi uses in his comments on that verse (27:18) is *"l'hanhig* – to lead." To be chosen as a paradigm for how a community should behave, that is, indeed, a privilege.

However, in the second verse, the one when Moses is convincing Joshua to take the job, he references the less pleasant aspect of leadership (and one that Moses knew all too well) – that of criticizing wrongdoings and demanding that the constituents do things that they prefer not to do.

For this reason, Rashi in that context (27:22) uses the Hebrew word *"parnes* – provider." The ultimate power behind a leader is that he is their provider, which is how he can compel them to do the right thing. This aspect of leadership is rarely appreciated at the time, and consequently this can be a very difficult and unpleasant thing to do. Therefore, Moses tells Joshua, "The reward for the providers of the Jewish people is in the next world."

In history we find some fascinating examples of leaders who sometimes combined both of these aspects of leadership 1) by serving as an example and 2) by getting their constituents to do something that they really preferred not to do.

Scurvy, a disease caused by a severe deficiency in vitamin C, was the scourge of ocean-going sailors for millennia. The symptoms of scurvy are both terrible and dramatic; it is estimated that between the 16th-18th centuries over two million sailors died from it. Because the typical ocean voyage required many months at sea (with, of course, no refrigeration), sailors relied on foods that were heavily salted or non-perishable. Fruits and leafy vegetables that naturally contain vitamin C were unavailable on long sea voyages.

While the U.S. Navy continued to struggle with scurvy through the 19th century, the British Royal Navy discovered in the 18th that it was caused by a lack of vitamin C and began storing lemons and limes on their ships and carefully rationed them to their sailors (this is why Brits are commonly referred to as Limeys).

Another enterprising ship's doctor discovered that smelly sour cabbage (or sauerkraut) had an incredible amount of Vitamin C. But how was he going to convince his shipmates to eat what seemed like spoiled cabbage? The ship's captain came up with the solution – he had them parade through the deck in full view of all the sailors, a huge platter of sour cabbage to be delivered to his cabin. Pretty soon, every sailor was demanding that they be given the same "fine food" that the captain seemed to be enjoying. Sure enough, as sailors began to commonly eat sour cabbage, symptoms of the disease disappeared.

Just as Moses ensured that Joshua fully understood both roles of leadership, we must understand and apply these same principles in our own homes.

A parent's primary leadership role is to inspire and educate one's children to follow the proper path to live. A person's children have to look at his example and feel like they want to emulate him. Of course, a key component of this is that the parent needs to be someone worthy of emulation.

But perhaps of even greater importance is the secondary role; a parent has to criticize and gently redirect his children when they make mistakes. But even then, the primary goal is to make sure the children understand he is doing it out of love for them, not because he wants to control them. In this way, they will choose to follow in his path long after they have left their parents' house.

TORAH PORTION: Pinchas, Numbers 25:10 - 30:1

In last week's Torah portion, Pinchas acted to stop a public display of immorality. He thus stemmed the plague of retribution that was killing the multitudes. He is rewarded by being made a Cohen by Divine decree.

The Almighty commands Moses to attack the Midianites in retribution for the licentious plot the Midianites perpetrated upon the Israelites. A new census is taken of the Jewish people revealing that there are 601,730 men available for army duty. God directs the division of the Land of Israel amongst the tribes. The Levites are tallied. The daughters of Tzelafchad come forward to petition Moses regarding their right of inheritance. Moses inquires of the Almighty, Who answers in their favor.

Moses asks the Almighty to appoint a successor and the Almighty directs Moses to designate Joshua (Yehoshua). The Torah portion concludes with the various offerings – daily, Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh (new month), and holidays.

SHABBAT LIGHTING: *Jerusalem* 7:04 *Miami* 7:51 *Cape Town* 5:44 *Guatemala* 6:15 *Hong Kong* 6:49 *Honolulu* 6:54

🕯️ *Jo'Burg* 5:20 *LA* 7:40 *London* 8:42 *Melbourne* 5:10 *Mexico* 6:56 *Moscow* 8:28 *New York* 7:58 *Singapore* 6:58 *Toronto* 8:28

"QUOTE OF THE WEEK": Running a country is a lot like running a cemetery, lots of people under you but no one is listening. — Bill Clinton

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