



RABBI AARON

Editor, Torah Tidbits

GOLDSCHIEDER

Halachic Thinking, Halachic Feeling

The day had finally arrived for Moshe to formally transfer his leadership to the next in line. God now commanded Moshe to lay one hand upon Yehoshua: “Take for yourself Yehoshua the son of Nun, a man of spirit, and you shall lay your hand upon him.” (Bamidbar 27:18). And yet, strikingly, Moshe laid both hands upon him.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt”l answered the apparent contradiction, positing that the second hand of Moshe was used to fulfill the second request that God had made of Moshe. He was called on to do the following: “You shall bestow some of your majesty upon him...” (Ibid. 27:20). This is why the verse says “He laid his hands (in plural) upon him...” (Ibid. 27:23). (Rabbi Soloveitchik ‘The Appointment of Joshua’, YouTube)

The question is what do both hands of Moshe represent? More specifically what is the meaning of receiving the attribute of *hod*, majesty, from Moshe?

In order to resolve this query the Rav cited a passage in the Rambam where he describes the transmission of the Torah and the Oral Law (Rambam, Introduction to *Mishne Torah*):

“Elazar, Pinchas and Yehoshua all three received from Moshe. To Yehoshua, who was Moshe Rabbenu’s student, he [i.e., Moshe] transmitted the Oral Torah, and commanded him regarding it.”

We see from the Rambam’s formulation that while Moshe taught many people, Yehoshua, above all others, was his primary student. And only Yehoshua was entrusted with the *mesorah* - conveying the oral tradition to others (“...and commanded him regarding it”). Evidently, this is the Rambam’s understanding of the first Mishna in Avot - “Moshe received the Torah at Sinai and transmitted it to Yehoshua, Yehoshua to the elders.” In a word, Moshe Rabbenu had one primary student, Yehoshua.

The question that begs to be asked is why Yehoshua was singled out - especially if others may have been superior? What was it that made Yehoshua uniquely capable of stepping into Moshe’s role?

In order to answer this, the Rav quoted the following midrashic explanation: “The Holy One blessed be He, said to him [Moshe]: ‘Whoever tends the fig-tree shall

eat its fruit; and he that waits on his master shall be honored' (*Mishlei* 27:18)...Yehoshua served you diligently and he showed you great honor. It was he who rose early in the morning and remained late at night at your House of Study; he would arrange the benches, and spread the mats. Seeing that he has served you with all his might, he is worthy to serve Israel..." (*Midrash Rabbah Bemidbar* 21:14).

The Rav drew attention to the Midrash's deliberate use of the metaphor of the fig tree. Unlike the fruits of the olive or date trees, the fruit of the fig tree takes particularly long to ripen. This lengthened ripening period is likened to a person's acquisition of Torah, which rather than being learned quickly overnight is absorbed, studied and learned over an extended period of time. Only one who guards the fig tree will merit to eat its fruit - the fruits of Torah. This is precisely what happened to Yehoshua.

In a word, the Sages are teaching that Yehoshua was a constant companion to Moshe. This idea appears in the Torah itself: "...his servant Yehoshua, the son of Nun, a young man, did not leave the Tent" (*Shemot* 33:11).

Despite the fact that Moshe may have had more talented and brighter students, Yehoshua was chosen by God as Moshe's successor based on his devotion, consistency and loyalty to his master. It is here that the Rav posits that spiritual greatness is not only the process of assimilating knowledge but the way it transforms the entire personality. One is to seek God in the words of the Torah and thereby ennoble their personality with



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purity and majesty (*hod*).

The Rav taught that the two hands of Moshe reflect two distinct traditions, or *mesorot*, that Moshe transferred to Yehoshua. One is the tradition (*mesorah*) of Torah learning, the wide range of laws and insights as well as *lomdus* (analytical analysis and application). The second *mesorah*, described as *hod* which was bequeathed to Yehoshua, was experiential. Yehoshua not only received the Torah from Moshe, but he absorbed how to live a life saturated with its teachings. "Yehoshua never left Moshe's side: He saw how Moshe davened Mincha, how he ate, how he *benched*, how he was *mekabel Shabbos*, how he said *vidui* on *Erev Yom Kippur*. He therefore merited both *mesorot*, the **mesorah of the mind** and **mesorah of the heart**." ■