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TORAH TIDBITS CONTRIBUTOR

# The Qualities of a Leader

*After G-d told Moshe to view the Promised Land from a distance:*

**Moshe spoke to G-d saying: “May Hashem, G-d of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a leader over the congregation. He shall go out before them and come in before them, and take them out and bring them in. And so the congregation of G-d shall not be like sheep that have no shepherd.”**

*G-d said to Moshe:*

**“Take Yehoshua the son of Nun, a man who has the spirit in him...” (27:15-18)**

Moshe’s quest for a successor prioritized the qualities of leadership: “He shall go out before them and come in before them, he shall take them out and bring them in”.

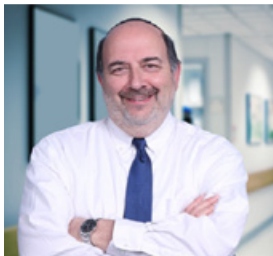
Rashi explains this refers to a person of great spiritual merit who will successfully lead them at the head of military campaigns as Moshe had in the recent wars of Sichon and Og, and Yehoshua in the earlier confrontation with Amalek.

The Sforno, as Rashi, interprets “He shall go out before them and come in before them” as a military leader, but he goes further in explaining “He shall take them out and bring them in” as being suitable as an administrator of national affairs. Moshe’s prayer to G-d was that the leader would know how to lead the people in times of war, and in times of peace.

Thus Moshe himself did not nominate a successor for his manifold inspirational and management tasks. He approached G-d as the “G-d of the spirits of all flesh” to pick out the one who should take over his mantle of leadership when the time came. G-d, Man’s creator, knew who truly was the right person for that role. Rashi, based on the Midrash Tanchuma, indicates that Moshe hoped that the position would go to one of his sons, Gershom or Eliezer. It was not to be so: G-d replied by making it clear that it would be his student Yehoshua who would continue his work and traditions.

Possibly, Moshe justified in hoping that G-d would consider the leadership to come from his offspring for the following reason. In the Torah, we hear nothing of Gershom and Eliezer once they arrived with Yitro. But maybe Moshe felt that at least one of them may have had hidden qualities that he himself didn’t know of, even though he was their father. In addition, they may have had unnoticed potential. History has shown repeatedly

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that although some people grow into successful leaders, others are propelled into greatness through the force of the responsibilities and the circumstances of their office. They then show dimensions and capacities that no-one would ever guess they ever had. This would especially be true where the 'spirit of G-d' would fall on them (c.f. Shmuel I 10:11-12 – "Is Shaul also among the prophets?").

But it was not to be. G-d, who sees the insides of people's minds and knows how they think, informed Moshe gently that it was to be his disciple rather than his son that was to take his leadership forward into Eretz Yisrael. Gently in that although Moshe approaches G-d firmly and decisively by speaking to G-d in the stronger *piel* form with 'Vayedaber', G-d, sensing Moshe's disappointment, changed the tone and replied to him in the softer *kal* form of 'Vayomer'.

Thus in considering his two sons, perhaps Moshe was like many parents of all generations who suffer fears and apprehensions as they watch their children grow up from close quarters: so much so that a person much further away can see the big picture more clearly. As they emerge as successful people in their work and in their communities, their parents shake their heads in pride with a "Whoever would have thought of it?" (Perhaps Gershom or Eliezer might have been the same, given the chance.) Indeed, those who know them in other contexts and have seen them at a greater distance may see the whole picture, and are thus less surprised.

But however well intentioned, in the case of Moshe as the parasha tell us, it was not to be. ■

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