

Parashat Pinchas 5775, 2015

Authentic Torah Leadership

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, HaRav Yosef Shemuel ben HaRav Reuven Aharon, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

There are many poignant passages in the *Chumash* (Torah). Perhaps one of the saddest of all appears in this week's *parasha*, in which Moshe was told that he was irrevocably banned from entering *Eretz Yisrael* (the Land of Israel):

The L-rd said to Moses, "Go up to this mount Abarim and look at the land that I have given to the children of Israel. And when you have seen it, you too will be gathered to your people, just as Aaron your brother was gathered. Because you disobeyed My command in the desert of Zin when the congregation quarreled, [when you were] to sanctify Me through the water before their eyes; these were the waters of dispute at Kadesh, in the desert of Zin." (*Sefer Bamidbar* 27:12-14, this and all Bible and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*, underlining my own)

Rashi (1040-1105), in his comment on the phrase, "these were the waters of dispute at Kadesh, in the desert of Zin," notes: "these [waters] alone; they [Moses and Aaron] had no other sin to their name." In other words, the sole reason why Moshe was denied entry into *Eretz Yisrael* was because he had struck, rather than spoken to the rock, thereby diminishing the magnitude of Hashem's miracle. (*Sefer Bamidbar* 20:8, 11) Tragically, this sin was sufficient reason to permanently bar his entry into the Promised Land.

Moshe's one aspiration at this juncture in his life was to follow the footsteps of *Avraham Avinu* (our father, Avraham) and see the plains, valleys and mountains of *Eretz Yisrael*. Surely most people would react with utmost misery if their life's dream was suddenly

shattered, echoing *David Hamelech's* (King David's) famous cry: "My G-d, my G-d, why have You forsaken me? [You are] far from my salvation [and] from the words of my moaning. My G-d, I call out by day and You do not reply..." (*Sefer Tehillim 22:2-3*)

Moshe, however, was different in kind and degree from most of mankind. Instead of focusing upon his own feelings of loss and despair, his sole concern was the future of the Jewish people:

Moses spoke to the L-rd, saying: 'Let the L-rd, the G-d of spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation, who will go forth before them and come before them, who will lead them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of the L-rd will not be like sheep without a shepherd.' (*Sefer Bamidbar 27:1-17*, underlining my own)

In truth, we are incredulous at Moshe's selflessness and single-minded dedication to the Jewish people at this time of crushing personal sorrow. Yet, in order to guard the future of the Jewish people and guarantee we would one day become a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (*Sefer Shemot 19:6*), Moshe felt it was crucial for the torch of Torah leadership to be passed to a wise, capable and discerning leader. As Rashi explains, "[Here we can readily see that Moshe embodies] the virtues of the righteous, for when they are about to depart from the world, they disregard their own needs and occupy themselves with the needs of the community." (27:15, brackets my own)

Hashem, in turn, immediately acceded to Moshe's heartfelt request:

The L-rd said to Moses, "Take for yourself Joshua the son of Nun, a man of spirit, and you shall lay your hand upon him [i.e. invest him with your glory]. And you shall present him before Eleazar the Kohen and before the entire congregation, and you shall command him in their presence. You shall bestow some of your majesty upon him so that all the congregation of the children of Israel will take heed. (*Sefer Bamidbar 27:18-20*)

Yehoshua was the perfect leader to follow *Moshe Rabbeinu* (our teacher Moshe). The Torah bears witness to his assiduous Torah learning: “Then the L-rd would speak to Moses face to face, as a man would speak to his companion, and he would return to the camp, but his attendant, Joshua, the son of Nun, a lad, would not depart from the tent.” (*Sefer Shemot* 33:11, underlining my own) Therefore, even though our Sages teach us that Yehoshua was like the moon to Moshe’s sun (*Talmud Bavli, Baba Batra* 75a), his spiritual greatness was nonetheless manifest to one and all. Here, then, was the next generation’s G-d-intoxicated man to lead the Jewish people to *Eretz Yisrael*, and continue the grand historical march toward the fulfillment of our nation’s ultimate mission.

With Hashem’s help, may we be *zocheh* (merit) to witness *biat hamashiach* (the coming of the Messiah), who will lead us in the rebuilding of the *Beit Hamikdash* (Holy Temple) and the ingathering of the exiles. May we all bask in the glow of his authentic Torah leadership, and may this time come soon, and in our days. *V’chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

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