

LOYAL LEADERSHIP

by Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetzky

At the end of Parshas Pinchos, Hashem tell Moshe Rabbeinu about the forthcoming end of his life, and the passing of the leadership to the next generation. Moshe, concerned about the future of his people, asks a request, "Hashem should choose a leader who will go and come in front of them, (the Jewish Nation) and the congregation of Israel should not be like a flock that does not have to them a shepherd."

Seemingly, Moshe Rabbeinu uses a few extra words. Instead of simply saying that the Jews should not be like "a flock without a shepherd," he adds the words "asher ein lahem roeh" that does not have to them a shepherd." Why the extra words?

Rabbi Paysach Krohn, in his book, "Around the Maggid's Table" (Artscroll, 1989) tells the following story. At the outbreak of World War One, A young man came to the great Gaon and leader of European Jewry, Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky for a blessing not to be inducted into the Russian army. The hazards of war were terrifying, and the army usually kept soldiers in their ranks for decades. After conversing with the teen for a bit, the Rav asked, "Do you wear tzitzis." "No." came the reply.

"Do you put on tefillin every day."

"No."

"Do you observe the Shabbos." The boy, looking down, embarrassed, and in a whisper he answered again, "No."

Silence permeated the room and the boy stood in fear of what the holy tzaddik would tell him. Instead, after a few moments, Rav Grodzinsky looked up at him, and in a calming, loving voice, he said, "I bless you that the Soviet authorities should be just as disappointed in you as I am."

Only a few weeks later, the boy came back to the Rav and told him, "Rebbe, your bracha worked! I was rejected by the Soviet army!" He then lifted his shirt to show the Rav his tzitzis. Needless to say, he returned to the path of observance.

My grandfather, Rav Binyamin Kamenetzky zt"l would explain based upon a passage in the Sefer Kehilos Yitzchok. Rav Jacob Joseph, a great orator, was appointed as the maggid of the city of Vilna in 1883, five years before coming to the United States to assume the position of chief Rabbi of the city of New York. In his inaugural address, he answered the question as follows.

One who tends to his own sheep does not care about the sheep per se, rather he worries about his bottom line. His concern for an injured sheep would be more for his bottom line than for the welfare of the animal.

But one who is watching sheep for someone else, doesn't care much about the bottom line. The sheep are not his, and he has no vested interest in them. His tending to the sheep is more idealistic, as he is concerned about the actual health and well-being of the sheep.

The same, explained Rav Joseph, is with leaders of people. There are many nations in the world – each one with a different leader. Some do their job well, but they ultimately care about their bottom line. The individual needs of the many citizens don't concern that all that much – as long as their position is secure and they win the next election.

Moshe wasn't worried that the Jews would be left without someone taking charge. He knew that there will be a leader. He wanted to ensure that the leader was a leader "of them." The new leader had to take into account the plight of every single Jew, each personal situation, and every individual's struggles and challenges. He wanted the leader to celebrate with them and revel with joy in their accomplishments. Therefore, he implored Hashem, "Let the Jews not be like a flock that does not have **to them** a leader." Moshe insisted that the leader be a leader "for them."

Moshe, the ultimate leader of the Jewish Nation, knew to instill this important trait in the future of our leaders for generations to come.