

# TRUE LEADERSHIP

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

*"And G-d said to him, 'what is in your hand?' And he said, 'a staff.' And He said, 'cast it to the ground,' and he cast it to the ground and it became a snake, and Moshe ran away from it."  
[4:2-3]*

The Medrash tells us the following story (Shemos Rabba 3): A Roman matron said to Rebbe Yossi, "my god is greater than your G-d." He asked her why. So she explained, "at the moment that your G-d revealed Himself to Moshe in the bush, Moshe covered his face [but did not move]. But when he saw the snake, which is my god, immediately 'Moshe ran away from it!'"

Rebbe Yossi replied that she did not understand. "When our G-d was revealed in the bush, there was no place to run. Where would he run -- to the heavens, the sea, or to dry land? What does it say concerning our G-d? 'Behold, I fill the heavens and the earth...' With the snake, which is your god, if a person merely runs two or three steps away he can escape and save himself, and this is why it says 'Moshe ran away from it.'"

Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech Hertzberg zt"l sees within this conversation a message about leadership. The Roman matron's god was the snake, because that was the type of leadership to which she was accustomed. Her leader was a snake then. Snakes will strike without cause or benefit, and we still find leaders of this variety today: dictators, who punish their people without cause or personal benefit, but only in order to demonstrate how powerful they are.

He also points out that those who spread gossip are like snakes, because their only "benefit" is malicious -- the sense of superiority which they get from putting down others. The dictator and gossip work together: the power of the dictator depends upon the gossip that people tell about one another, even that ministers tell. No one dares make a misstep, and thus the dictator rules from fear.

Our teacher Moshe ran away from "leadership" of this nature. He wanted no part of it, for it runs completely contrary to the kindness and generosity of our forebears, the kindness demanded of us by the Torah. The Jewish path towards leadership is built upon humility, mercy and righteousness, not the methods of a snake. The Jewish path is indicated only a few verses later, when G-d says, "in order that they will believe that the G-d of their forebears appeared to you, the G-d of Abraham, the G-d of Isaac, the G-d of Jacob." [4:5]

Jewish leaders should inspire people to recognize and have faith in the G-d of our forebears, by demonstrating an entirely different -- and sanctified -- style of leadership. The Jewish leader may use his staff, but only out of concern for his land and his people, not for personal reasons, and certainly not out of malice.

This lesson applies to all of us: when we behave with kindness, consideration, and love for others, we inspire respect for ourselves, for our people, and for our G-d.

Good Shabbos