

ENLIGHTENED LEADER

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aaron the Kohen, turned back My wrath from upon the Children of Israel... Therefore, say: Behold! I give him My covenant of peace... [25:10-12]

In a shocking display of insolence, a Jew (Zimri ben Salu) brought an idolatress (Kozbi bas Tzur) directly to Moshe and the elders at the entrance to the Ohel Moed and sinned in public view. No one, not even Moshe, knew what to do. They wept helplessly. No one remembered the law - no one, that is, except Pinchas.

He approached Moshe. "Didn't you teach us," Pinchas asked, "that one who does such, a zealous one may slay him?!"

"Indeed!" replied Moshe. "Since you have remembered the law - you carry out the deed!"

Because of his zealousness, Pinchas was given an unprecedented reward: He was allowed entrance into the exclusive family of the Kohanim, the holy priests who performed the services in the Mishkan (Tabernacle) and later in the Mikdash (Holy Temple).

Why was Moshe so insistent that Pinchas himself carry out the deed? Let us first examine Moshe's leadership, in order to understand exactly what type of leadership environment existed that allowed Pinchas to take such a bold step in the face of Moshe's silence.

Once upon a time - indeed for thousands of years - the ultimate in leadership was seen as absolute authoritarianism. Complete and total dictatorship. The more powerful and dominant the leader, the greater his leadership was.

It is only in recent "enlightened" times that we have come to the realization that abusive power and control, while giving the impression of supreme authority, in fact erode the trust and love necessary for leadership to be truly effective, and stifle the creativity which can allow one to reach one's true potential.

Take for example the corporate environment. In previous generations, it had been thought that the most effective way to run a company was with a staunch, unyielding hand. The tighter the ship, the more productive and cost-efficient the bottom line. It is only recently that the corporate world has begun to understand that by increasing the independence and authority given employees, within a framework, the "bottom line" too can be increased.

"Empowerment" is a buzz-word among today's motivational psychologists. The more "empowered"

we allow others to feel, the greater their interest becomes in doing the best they can do. In a dictatorial environment, an employee may very well do his work efficiently and carefully, but it is done so out of fear and consternation. By contrast, in an environment of "empowerment" and cooperation, employees go beyond simply following orders and doing what they're told; they begin to take an interest in finding new solutions and innovative methods, sometimes coming up with bold and successful ideas that would never have occurred to their superiors.

Any rebbe or teacher can attest to the fact that while lecturing and dictation may be the easiest and most efficient way to keep an unruly bunch of pre-teens quiet and subdued, the greatest learning takes place when children actively participate in the subject material. The more students are made to feel that their input is necessary and important, the greater an interest they take. By "empowering" children with a degree of self-authority - of course with the guidance of their rebbes, teachers, or parents - we give them the potential for maximum self-growth and learning.

What type of leader was Moshe? Was he approachable, or was his dictatorship absolute? The suggestions of Yisro (Moshe's father-in-law, see beginning of Parshas Yisro) and the daughters of Tzlofchad (see this week's parsha 27:1-5) suggest that Moshe was exceptionally approachable and open to the suggestions of others. I would suggest that such an attitude was extremely unusual for a leader in those times. Moshe did not see it as a personal weakness if others became involved. Perhaps, to the contrary, he realized that by being approachable and accessible to his fledgling nation, he was empowering them to achieve to the maximum of their own potential.

"I alone can not carry this entire nation - it is too difficult for me! And if this is how You deal with me, then kill me now! (Bamidbar 11:14)" In parshas Be-halosecha, Moshe pleads with Hashem for help with the leadership of the Jews. But why did he season his entreaty with the exaggerative, "And if not - kill me!"? Was Moshe, G-d forbid, throwing a temper-tantrum? Was he confrontationally throwing down the gauntlet - saying that "either it's his way or no way?"

Seforno understands this passage as follows. Moshe felt his leadership was inherently weakened as a result of his carrying the entire burden. While not directly questioning Hashem's wisdom in doing so, Moshe understood that perhaps the reason Hashem had placed him in such a position was out of regard for Moshe; that it would in some way be disrespectful to Moshe to allow others to play a role in the leadership.

To dispel this notion, Moshe says to Hashem, "I can no longer carry the burden of this nation alone! I feel that not only is my influence over Bnei Yisrael not stronger as a result, it is weaker. And ultimately, that means that I am doing a second-class job of giving over Your message to them. Now, if this is how You deal with me - i.e. if you are doing so out of regard for my feelings, I understand. However, I still feel that I will be a stronger and more influential leader when I share my power with others. If, in Your eyes, this is impossible, then rather kill me now, and let someone else take over who is capable of leading the nation with the help of others, instead of dictating to them!"

Instead of abusing the power given to him by Hashem, Moshe sought to share that power with others, ultimately strengthening not only them, but also himself. Only in such an environment - one which encouraged and promoted the input and suggestions of others - could a Pinchas have come forth and "taken the law into his own hands." In an oppressive, dictatorial atmosphere, would it not be viewed as great audacity and nerve for Pinchas to even suggest an alternative course of action in the face of Moshe's silence? It was only because Moshe, time and again, had impressed upon the nation the importance of their input and suggestions, that it even occurred to Pinchas to put forth his case, and ultimately carry out the deed, thereby stopping the burgeoning plague.

Perhaps this is why Moshe insisted that, "since you made the suggestion - you carry out the deed." What it has taken us until this very generation to understand, Moshe knew more than three thousand years ago; the more others become involved, the stronger leadership becomes. Pinchas - you carry out the deed, so that everyone may know that it was your suggestion, and not mine, that made the day.

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