

# ALTRUISM OR NEPOTISM / A JEWISH LEADER NEEDS MORE THAN JUST G-D GIVEN TALENT

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: CD #995 – The Mitzva of Shiluach Hakain: Do We Make A Bracha? Good Shabbos!

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## Moshe's Request to G-d: Altruistic Or A Touch Of Nepotism?

In Parshas Pinchas, Rashi says that Moshe Rabbeinu now knew that he was not destined to go into *Eretz Yisrael* with the Jewish people and as such, he needed to make sure that they would have a proper leader following his passing. Rashi speaks about the altruism of Moshe Rabbeinu's request to the Almighty under these circumstances: "This is stated here to inform you of the praiseworthiness of the righteous. When they take their leave from the world, they put aside their own concerns, and deal with the concerns of the public." [Rashi on Bamidbar 27:15]

Moshe continues his request, delineating the desirable attributes of a worthy Jewish leader: "May Hashem, G-d of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the assembly who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall take them out and who shall bring them in; and let the assembly of Hashem not be like sheep that have no shepherd." [Bamidbar 27:16-17]

However, despite what Rashi wrote in *pasuk* 15, as quoted above, Rashi says something in his comment on the very next *pasuk*, which seems to contradict his earlier remarks about Moshe's altruism. Rashi writes in *pasuk* 16: "Once Moshe heard the Omnipresent say 'Give Zelophehad's inheritance to his daughters,' he said, 'The time has come that I should claim what I need (i.e. -- that I should think of my family) that my sons should inherit my high position.'" How do we reconcile what seems to be an apparent contradiction in Rashi? Was Moshe being altruistic or was he looking out for the needs of his own family?

The sefer Avir Yosef, in connection with this question, references the Sefer HaChinuch's explanation of why the Torah instituted a section regarding laws of inheritance. Why is it that the Torah legislates that when a person dies all of his property and all of his possessions go to his children? The Chinuch writes that we all come down to this world with a mission that the Almighty has in mind for us. All the

things He provides for us in this world are tools to complete our designated mission. After a person leaves this world, sometimes his mission is incomplete. Even if it is complete, he wants people to build on what he has accomplished thus far in carrying out his mission.

Therefore, the Chinuch writes, the person (people) who is (are) usually most appropriate to carry on the father's mission in life is (are) his child (children). Genetically, emotionally, and in terms of talents children often get their strengths and talents from their parents. Children are obviously not clones but they certainly are similar to their parents in many ways. Therefore, if there are people in the world that are typically "fit" to carry on the mission of their parents, it is indeed their children. For that reason, the Chinuch says, the Torah legislates that children should take possession of their parent's tools to carry on their mission.

If the person now leaves the world and he expects his children to carry on his mission, they in fact need those worldly possessions to be able to carry on their father's work. If that is the case, it the reason Moshe Rabbeinu asked that his children inherit his position may not be that he was interested in nepotism or that he was looking for a job for his kids. Moshe Rabbeinu was way beyond that and way above that.

Moshe Rabbeinu's mission in life was to be the teacher of Israel, the master of all the prophets and the leader of the Jewish people. He felt that his children were best suited to carry on that mission. They were, after all, his children. It was certainly within the realm of possibility that they would be the ones destined to carry on that mission.

Obviously, the Almighty had different plans. He told Moshe "this is not what I had in mind." "It is appropriate that Yehoshua now take the reward for his years of service. He was your faithful disciple who never left your tent." About this, Shlomo HaMelech wrote, "he who guards the fig tree will eat its fruit." [Mishlei 27:18]

Therefore, we see that Moshe Rabbeinu was not totally off the mark. For as his loyal disciple and servant of many years, Yehoshua had become the individual most suited to carry on Moshe's mission in life. However, this was never about the position that one's children would have in life. This is indeed, as Rashi says, about Klal Yisrael -- the future of the Jewish people and the qualities of the future leader of the Jewish people. That was Moshe Rabbeinu's motivation.

Moshe's motivation was always the welfare of the people. There was no personal agenda. That is why Rashi introduces this teaching of Chazal by saying, "Look at the greatness of the righteous. They are not concerned about their own needs. They are concerned about the community." In that context, Moshe felt that the people most suited to carry on his mission were his children. Therefore, with the good of the people in mind, he said, "It is now the time that my children should assume my position of leadership."

The Almighty felt that Moshe Rabbeinu was mistaken about who was most appropriate to assume leadership in *Klal Yisrael* at this historical juncture. In His Eyes, Yehoshua should have this job.

However, this does not diminish from the fact that Moshe Rabbeinu's only concern was indeed that the people should have the proper leader.

## A Jewish Leader Needs More Than Just G-d Given Talent

My next comment relates to the very next Rashi following the one we just discussed. On the *pasuk* "May Hashem, G-d of the spirits of all flesh appoint a man over the assembly" [Bamidbar 27:16], Rashi comments about the peculiar title "G-d of the spirits" (*Elokai ha'Ruchos*): "Why is this stated? Moshe said before Him, 'Master of the World! The personality of each individual is revealed before You; they do not resemble each other. Appoint a leader who can put up with each individual according to his personality.'"

A myriad of personalities exist within the Jewish nation. *Klal Yisrael* never was a monolithic body. The Rabbis tell us "Just as no two people look alike, no two people have exactly the same opinion" [Brachos 58a]. People have different personalities, different opinions, different approaches, and differing emotional makeups. Therefore, a Jewish leader needs to tolerate and suffer with all these personality types according to each one's own quirks and temperament. This was Moshe's request to Hashem. He must appoint someone who could handle the whole spectrum of personalities found within the Jewish nation.

I saw an observation made by Rav Simcha Zissel, the Rosh Yeshiva of the Chevron Yeshiva in his sefer, *Saam Derech*. He calls attention to the fact that the Torah says in the subsequent *pesukim* "Take to yourself Yehoshua son of Nun, a man in whom there is spirit, and lean your hand upon him... You shall place of your splendor upon him, so that the entire assembly of the Children of Israel will pay heed." [Bamidbar 27:18; 20]

This means that a person cannot just step into being the leader of *Klal Yisrael*. The leader needs to be invested with Divine Spirit and be inspired -- not just from Moshe Rabbeinu, but from the *Ribono shel Olam*. This placement of the hands whereby Moshe Rabbeinu gave "*semicha*" to Yehoshua symbolized the fact that Moshe Rabbeinu was a conduit. The Master of the Universe passed on these talents -- the wisdom and the intuition necessary to lead the people -- through Moshe to his Divinely chosen successor.

No person is born with the talents required for leadership of *Klal Yisrael*. He does not come to such talent on his own. It requires *S'yata d'Shmaya* [Help from Heaven]. Only the fact that the Almighty gives those people the necessary tools to do the job enables them to succeed. If that is the case and indeed it was all going to be a gift from the *Ribono shel Olam*, then why was it necessary to appoint someone who could (to use Rashi's expression) "tolerate the personality of each and every individual?" If the Almighty provides all the wisdom and strengths necessary for the job to the leader anyhow, why does it matter who He chooses? Let Him take absolutely anybody for the job and then give him the necessary tools!

Rav Simcha Zissel explains that the talents the Almighty can grant a person fall into the realm of intellectual capabilities: Knowledge of Torah, Divine Help, intelligence, the skills required to lead people in battle, and organizational and bureaucratic skills. The Almighty could indeed provide all these. However, there is one thing that the *Ribono shel Olam* cannot give to a person -- those are his *middos tovos* -- his personality traits, the type of *mentsch* [person] that he is -- that a person needs to achieve on his own. That cannot be a gift from Hashem. Hashem does not take a person who has a temper and who has no patience and is irritable and suddenly make him into an accepting and tolerant person.

Therefore, as a prerequisite for the job, Moshe Rabbeinu says to the *Ribono shel Olam* -- it must be a person who suffers the quirks of each and every member of *Klal Yisrael*. Yes, Hashem can give him the intellectual capabilities and the organizational skills. He can give him all those talents. However, the *middos*, the character traits, the type of *mentsch* the person is that is cannot be a gift. The person must work on himself and earn them during his lifetime. He must be the type of person that has worked on his personality and has perfected his character to the degree that he can now tolerate all types of personalities and "suffer" (be *sovel*) the entire spectrum of human idiosyncrasies. These are not G-d given talents. They are things a person develops on his own.

Moshe Rabbeinu sought this type of person as his successor when he addressed "the G-d of all spirits".

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Pinchas is provided below:

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