
~ JEWISH LEADERSHIP I ~

What is Jewish Leadership and What Characterizes a Leader?

The importance of leadership in business, government, and every facet of society is so well-known it is almost a cliché. The shelves of our bookstores are filled with books of advice on how to become a leader.

One might wonder: what does Judaism have to say about leadership? This two-part series on Jewish leadership is not only relevant for those who see themselves as leaders, but for all of us – we all play the role of a leader in one way or another, whether as a friend, teacher, spouse or parent. This class will try to identify the qualities required for leadership by examining great Jewish leaders and the qualities they possess.

The second class on Jewish leadership will focus on additional attributes required for leadership, and offer practical ideas on how anyone can become empowered to be a leader, jump-starting and maintaining inspirational programs.

This class will address the following questions:

- How is leadership in Judaism distinct from the general idea of leadership?
- What qualities should a Jewish leader have?
- What qualities characterized great historical leaders in Judaism?
- Why was Moshe (Moses) selected as the quintessential national leader?

Class Outline:

Section I. Jewish Leadership – Yes, You!

Section II. Ready to Take Action

Section III. Empathy and Compassion

Section IV. Patience

SECTION I. JEWISH LEADERSHIP – YES, YOU!

Ask yourself: am I more comfortable being a leader or a follower? If you're like most people, the answer is probably the latter. Let's look at Judaism's approach to the question.

1. **Rabbi Yaakov Salomon, *Salomon Says: 50 Stirring and Stimulating Stories*, p. 179 – Not a leader? Impossible! Just be yourself and feel a little compassion for others.**

Leadership, me? I am not a leader. Period.

I'm a follower ... and a good one, at that. I'm quiet, unassuming, timid, cautious, and decidedly unadventurous. I avoid the limelight and disdain any kind of attention. I dislike parties. I have the personality of a stapler. Heck, I don't even vote. In short, I just mind my own business.

Sound like you? Well, I have some important news for you. YOU'RE WRONG! Sorry for yelling, but I'm trying to make sure I get my message through to you. Oh, you may indeed be quiet, timid, and restrained. I don't doubt that. You may even hide when the mailman comes. But, believe it or not, that doesn't mean you are not a leader.

You probably think leadership is genetic and if your last name isn't Bonaparte or Giuliani you just don't have what it takes. But the good news is that you need not be related to Moses or Queen Esther to qualify. You can just be ... well ... yourself. Yes, with all your insecurities, imperfections, anxieties, and stapler personality. You are still not ineligible.

One of the only traits that is essential to great leadership is compassion. It is very hard to affect anyone else without feeling a certain measure of caring for another person. It is, I believe, the single indispensable characteristic that truly unites all leaders. (Notice, if you will, that I am not including the Hitler's and Hussein's of the world, whose "leadership skills" were channeled exclusively in forming oppressive and tyrannical regimes.)

All truly great leaders throughout history felt a compelling desire to better the lives of others: globally, communally, or personally. And that desire was an expression of the sense of compassion that resonated within them, no matter where life's circumstances took them or how turbulent the storms they weathered seemed to be ...

So remember, you don't have to be Joshua, King David, or especially great at anything at all. Just be yourself and feel a little compassion. It happens every day.

2. **Emuna Braverman, *Everything I know about Leadership I Learned from Moses*, (aish.com) – Moses was the greatest leader of the Jewish people, yet he was inexperienced, imperfect, and stuttered when he spoke. And you say, "I can't be a leader"?!**

A leader is not necessarily someone who has the all the appropriate talent in place for the job at hand. A leader is someone who sees the job at hand and does something about it, who recognizes that the task is crucial and no one else is doing it ...

Moses was that person. He wasn't perfect, he wasn't experienced, he stuttered when he spoke. But when he saw his people were in trouble, when he saw a job that needed to be done, he acted. He took responsibility, even at risk to his own life. Therefore the Almighty chose him to lead. It wasn't magical or supernatural. You don't have to have the charisma of a JFK or even a Bill Clinton. You just have to choose ...

What are the crucial jobs that need to be done? Don't wait. *Carpe diem.*

Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe (1914-2005) used to tell his students to look at the needs of the Jewish people. The particular problem that each would see and try to solve would be the area in which he could achieve spiritual greatness. As we shall see in the following story, each of us can ask, “Where do I see the need for someone to stand up and be a leader?”

From earliest childhood Chavi Rabinowitz was painfully shy. The next-to-youngest of the eleven children of Sima and Rafael Nachman Rabinowitz, she was content to play with her siblings. Interacting with others, however, especially adults, was invariably a source of heart-pounding anxiety. Sima was mindful of the unique nature of each of her children, and understood that Chavi was more sensitive than the rest. But in the area of communal service, there was no compromise. Even at age nine, Chavi was expected to be a foot soldier in her mother’s legendary chesed army.

Her job was to read two evenings a week to Estelle Leibenson, a woman blind from birth, in her sixties, who never married, and lived alone. She was deeply grateful for assistance, company, and conversation. One mild winter evening several months into their relationship, the woman sighed deeply. “Two years,” she murmured wistfully, “just two more years ...”

“Two more years – and what?” Chavi asked hesitantly, curious, but not wishing to pry.

“In two years, I will be able to see!”

“WHAT! But ... how?”

“That’s when I turn sixty-five, with God’s help, and become eligible for government assistance. And then I will finally be able to afford the surgery that can correct my vision.”

Chavi was thunderstruck. She had no idea that Estelle’s lifelong blindness was of a type that could, in fact, be reversed by today’s surgical tools and techniques. If, indeed, an operation already exists that can confer vision and independence upon Estelle after a lifetime in the dark, she thought, why should the poor woman be forced to wait two years closer to the grave in order to have it?

The next morning, Chavi stormed into every single classroom of the Beit Yaakov Elementary School she attended – even the formidable six graders. The girl, who once shrank from her peers, now commanded their rapt attention. “Look at me” she ordered. “And now close your eyes and think of poor Miss Leibenson who has lived this way every day of her life, and has to keep on living this way only because she doesn’t have money for surgery! Lo ta’amod al dam rei’acha ... do not stand idly by your neighbor’s blood!” she thundered, invoking the Torah’s prohibition against complacency when a life hangs in the balance. By the end of the school day, Chavi had tirelessly solicited every girl in her school, and – at least from her adorably naïve perspective – was wildly successful.

Unable to contain her excitement, Chavi headed immediately to Estelle’s apartment. “OK, let’s GO!” commanded Chavi.

“But where?”

“I’ve got the money for your operation and we mustn’t waste another minute!” Estelle was so suddenly caught off guard that she acquiesced, being led by a pint-sized powerhouse on a mission.

There was no training, religious or medical – and Dr. Marty Moskowitz had a good deal of both – that gave the busy ophthalmologist a clue as to what this odd couple was doing in his office. It did not take long for Dr. Moskowitz to confirm that Estelle Leibenson’s condition was amenable to surgery and he agreed to take her on as a patient. His next available opening, he informed them, was in two-and-a-half months. Chavi rejected this

news out of hand. “My friend can’t wait until then!” she said firmly. “We want the surgery ... today!” “Today?” Dr. Moskowitz repeated, trying to hold back the laughter.

“Yes, today. We’re here, we’re ready!”

A second look at Chavi’s earnest expression told Dr. Moskowitz that this was no laughing matter. “Young lady, Miss Leibenson needs a complicated surgery called ‘vitrectomy’ and this can only be done in a hospital, not a doctor’s office. Also, in order to get medical clearance, she will need to undergo many more tests than the ones I just performed – and it can take days to get some of the lab results ... and then, of course we’ll have to coordinate a surgical team ... And, I only have surgery rights in the operating room one day a week.”

“Well, did you already do a surgery this week?” Chavi questioned eagerly.

“Actually no – I have a gentleman scheduled for tomorrow.”

“So you can do Estelle right afterwards!”

“Look,” said Dr. Moskowitz wearily, “I give you my solemn word that because of the, ah, unusual circumstances here, I will make this surgery my highest priority and move Miss Leibenson to the top of my cancellation list. All right, Chavi? Now as far as payment ...”

“It’s all been taken care of,” Chavi chimed in, handing him a bulging envelope. Dr. Moskowitz peered inside, “How did you get this?”

“It’s everything I saved from birthdays and Chanukah gelt, and from some money I get for watching my baby brother,” Chavi replied blushing. “But a lot of it” she continued excitedly – lowering her eyes lest she appear conceited – “is what I collected at my school.” Dr. Moskowitz was silent for a few moments. He carefully placed the envelope inside the pocket of his lab coat. “Miss Leibenson, I’m sure you have many questions and I shall answer them all. For now, let me assure you that the discomfort will be manageable, and if everything is successful, which I expect it will be, God willing – you will begin to have sight only a few days after the operation.”

A mere nineteen days after Chavi had marched her into Dr. Moskowitz’s office, Estelle was admitted into Long Island Jewish Hospital. Her surgery was an unqualified success. Seeing the world and all of its colors for the first time was overwhelming. She was reborn. The very first place Estelle ventured out unaided after her recovery was to the Rabinowitz home. Somehow the monumental news of Estelle Leibenson’s life changing surgery had failed to reach the chesed captain who had so generously helped for years to coordinate her care.

“You didn’t know?” Estelle gasped. “But how could you not know ... it’s all thanks to your Chavi!”

If the first shock wasn’t earth-shattering enough, the second surely was. “My ... Chavi?” The possibility that her nine-year-old – the least assertive of all her children – had even the slightest role in Estelle’s medical metamorphosis was beyond her comprehension. After Estelle Leibenson took her leave, Sima discreetly launched her own investigation and the full story was revealed. In fact, although Estelle’s insurance had covered the hospital fee, it did not cover the huge bill for the surgery. Reluctantly, Sima went to Dr. Moskowitz’s office. “As I explained, doctor, I was completely unaware of what my little girl had arranged. Naturally I am most grateful that you were able to grant sight to Miss Leibenson, and I realize that a great deal of money is owed you. I only ask you put us on a long-term payment plan. What about, say thirty years?”

“Mrs. Rabinowitz, this has been the most extraordinary transaction of my career. How often does one get the mitzvah, the incredible opportunity, to restore sight to someone who has none? I wouldn’t trade this privilege for all the money in the world. But I wonder if I might ask one favor ...”

He reached into his pocket and carefully removed a crumpled envelope. It contained, he said \$83 ... mostly one dollar bills. "This is what your little girl presented to me as payment for the surgery," he explained quietly. "It represents her savings and what she collected. Do I have permission to keep it?"

The lump in Sima Rabinowitz's throat was so large that she could do nothing but nod wordlessly. "You see, Mrs. Rabinowitz, whenever I become discouraged – and we doctors often do, because there are so many whom we are unable to help – I reach into my pocket, and my faith, my sense of purpose, is restored; I feel as though your Chavi has paid me millions." (From *Too Beautiful*, by Rabbi Hanoch Teller, Feldheim Publishers.)

Even a nine-year-old can be a leader! As the next source illustrates, anyone who identifies a need in society and responds with action is a leader.

3. **Rabbi Jonathan Rosenblum, Needed: One More Chesed Entrepreneur, Mishpacha Magazine, September 1, 2005 – Creating a chesed organization by channeling creative business acumen.**

A few weeks ago, I was introduced to two Klausenberger *chasidim* who have created a medical referral organization, Refa'eino [literally, Heal us], with branches in Israel, Switzerland, and the United States, and an annual budget of many millions of dollars. That meeting brought home to me one of the unique aspects of the Jewish world: the entrepreneurial spirit ... has been greatly channeled into *chesed* [acts of loving kindness] activities. In addition to *business* entrepreneurs, we have *chesed* entrepreneurs.

Seeing a job that needs to get done, and stepping up to the plate is the starting point of becoming a leader. As we shall see in the next source, this willingness to take responsibility is asked from all of us.

4. **Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) 2:5 – Judaism requires that we all be ready to become leaders.**

In a place where there are no leaders, strive to be a leader.

ובמקום שאין אנשים השתדל להיות איש.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION I:

- ⇒ Most people are content to be followers rather than leaders. Most people think they lack the "special talents" for the job. Yet Moshe was the greatest leader of the Jewish people – despite his inexperience and stutter – because he took responsibility where no one else did.
- ⇒ Anyone who has a sense of compassion for others, and is prepared to act, is a leader. And Judaism tells us that everyone is responsible to lead: "In a place where there are no leaders, strive to be a leader" (Pirkei Avot 2:5).

SECTION II. READY TO TAKE ACTION

By definition, a leader must be ready to take action. It is not enough to empathize with a person or simply believe in a cause, a leader must have the courage and energy to act.

The episodes described in the following two sources demonstrate how Moshe Rabbeinu possessed these qualities, causing him to be selected to lead the Jewish people out of Egypt.

1. **Shemot (Exodus) 2:11-19 – Three episodes in which Moshe took initiative and action: he prevented injustice against the weak, pursued peace, and helped strangers.**

1. And it came to pass in those days, when Moshe was grown up, that he went out to his brothers and saw their burdens. He saw an Egyptian hitting a Hebrew, one of his brothers. He turned this way and that, and when he saw that there was no man [ish, to take responsibility for helping his brothers] he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

2. And he went out on the next day and behold, two Hebrew men were fighting. He said to the one that did the wrong, "Why do you hit your fellow?" He replied, "Who made you a man [ish], a ruler and a judge over us? Do you propose to kill me, as you killed the Egyptian?" Moshe was frightened and he thought: "Indeed, the matter [of my killing the Egyptian] is known!"

3. ... Moshe fled ... and settled in the land of Midian; and he sat down by the well. The priest of Midian [Yitro/Jethro] had seven daughters. They came and drew water, and filled the troughs to water their father's sheep. The shepherds came and drove them away, but Moshe got up and saved them and watered their sheep ... And they said [to their father Yitro], "An Egyptian man [ish] saved us from the shepherds ... and watered the sheep."

1. ויהי בימים ההם ויגדל משה ויצא אל אחיו וירא בסבלתם וירא איש מצרי מכה איש עברי מאחיו: ויפן כה וכה וירא כי אין איש ויך את המצרי ויטמנהו בחול:

2. ויצא ביום השני והנה שני אנשים עברים נצים ויאמר לרשע למה תכה רעך: ויאמר מו שמך לאיש שר ושפט עלינו הלהרגני אתה אמר כאשר הרגת את המצרי וירא משה ויאמר אכן נודע הדבר:

3. ... ויברח משה ... וישב בארץ מדין וישב על הבאר: ולכהן מדין שבע בנות ותבאנה ותדלנה ותמלאנה את הרהטים להשקות צאן אביהן: ויבאו הרעים ויגרשום ויקם משה ויושען וישק את צאנם: ותבאנה אל רעואל אביהן ויאמר מדוע מהרתן בא היום: ותאמרן איש מצרי הצילנו מיד הרעים וגם דלה דלה לנו וישק את הצאן:

2. **Shemot 3:1-2 ,with Shemot Rabbah 2:2 – In addition to the attributes above, Moshe demonstrated the qualities of empathy and willingness to take action when he cared for an exhausted lamb. Because of all these qualities, he was chosen to lead the Jewish people.**

4. Now, Moshe was keeping the flock of Yitro his father-in-law ... and he led the flock to the ... wilderness ... and the angel of the Lord appeared to him ...

Shemot Rabbah

Once, while Moshe Rabbeinu was tending Yitro's sheep, a lamb ran away. Moshe ran after it until it reached a small, shaded place. There the lamb came across a pool of water and began to drink. As Moshe approached the lamb he said, "I did not know you ran away because you were thirsty. You must be tired." So he put the lamb on his shoulders and carried him back. The Holy One said, "You tend the flock which belongs to a

4. ומשה היה רעה את צאן יתרו חתנו ... וינהג את הצאן אחר המדבר ... וירא מלאך ה' אליו בלבת אש מתוך הסנה ...

שמות רבה

אמרו רבותינו כשהיה מרעה רועה צאנו של יתרו במדבר ברח ממנו גדי ורץ אחריו עד שהגיע לחסית כיון שהגיע לחסית נזדמנה לו בריכה של מים ועמד הגדי לשתות כיון שהגיע משה אצלו אמר אני לא הייתי יודע שרץ היית מפני צמא עיף אתה הרכיבו על כתיפו והיה מהלך אמר הקב"ה יש לך רחמים לנהוג צאנו של בשר ודם כך, חייך אתה תרעה צאני ישראל הווי ומשה היה רועה:

human [Yitro] with such overwhelming compassion. I swear to you, as you live today, that you will tend the flock which belongs to Me – Israel.” This happened, and Moshe became their shepherd.

What prompted Moshe to act in all of these cases?

3. **Rabbi Ari Z. Zivotofsky, *The Leadership Qualities of Moshe, Judaism, 1994* – A basic quality of a leader is standing up to injustice.**

Moshe [is characterized] as an individual who is incapable of standing idly by while an injustice is being perpetrated ... Whatever consequences he may face, he nonetheless feels obligated to act to undo and correct the injustice. He is a man in a place where there are no men. And he always recognizes such situations.

Others may say that they would help if they had recognized the need; Moshe was uniquely sensitive to recognize the need. This is the aspect the Bible itself wants to stress in the four biblical stories [in the previous sources].

In the following two sources, we see a modern example of someone who took the initiative to lead with great dedication in a time of great need.

4. **Rabbi Jonathan Rosenblum, “In the Presence of the *Shechinah*,” *Mishpacha Magazine, April 24, 2007* – A modern example of such selflessness is Mike Tress, who was the long-time leader of Agudath Israel of America.**

Between 1939-41, Zeirei Agudath Israel was under the leadership of Reb Elimelech Gavriel (“Mike”) Tress and was the most active group in America procuring visas for Jews trapped in Europe. In addition, Zeirei sent food packages to Jews in Polish ghettos and conducted massive fundraising campaigns to ransom Jews from the Nazis.

All of the legwork was done by volunteers, the vast majority of whom were in their mid to late teens. It was they who laboriously typed out the lengthy forms necessary for each visa application, solicited affidavits of financial support, and collected the money on street corners, buses, trolley cars, and by going door to door. After the war, young volunteers came in late at night, after their studies, to pack packages that were sent through the Army Post Office to the survivors in the DP camps.

The purpose of this work was to save lives ...

Continuing from the previous source, the following source is an account of the devoted selflessness of Mike Tress.

5. **Rabbi Jonathan Rosenblum, *They Called Him Mike*, pp. 21-22** – The complete selflessness of Mike Tress.

Throughout the late 1940s and '50s, Agudath Israel of America went through repeated financial crises. Of those called in to help the organization put its financial affairs in order was a lawyer named Sam Feinberg. In the course of his work, Feinberg had occasion to review the financial records of the organization's officers, including those of its president, Mike Tress ...

Feinberg could not restrain himself from sharing the results of his investigations into Mike's personal finances ... He had been so astounded by the tale revealed in those records that he could not believe his own eyes. He had called over three other lawyers in the office to confirm that he understood the records correctly, and their amazement had been no less than his own.

When he went to work full time for the Youth Council of Agudath Israel of America in 1939, Mike Tress was a rich man by the standards of the day, with a handsome stock portfolio and substantial savings from his job as an executive with the textile firm of S.C. Lamport, Inc. His bank records from 1939 onward revealed an interesting pattern. One day, hundreds of dollars would be removed from Mike's personal account. The next day the same amount would be credited to the account of the Agudath Israel Youth Council. (And this at a time that Mike was working day and night without taking a salary.) This pattern repeated itself throughout the war years and beyond until there was nothing left in the bank account.

Next the stock portfolio began to be sold off. Block after block was sold and the proceeds immediately transferred to the account of the Youth Council to allow it to carry on its rescue work. When the shares had all been sold, the Tress apartment, in which Mike lived with a large and rapidly growing family, was mortgaged – once, twice, three times. And again the proceeds of each mortgage went right into the coffers of Agudath Israel. When there was no more equity in the house, Mike began to take out personal loans to cover the expenses of Agudah.

In a decade and a half, the once prosperous businessman had become little more than a pauper, for only one reason: At a time when dollars could be translated into Jewish lives, he was incapable of not giving everything he had.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION II:

- ∞ A leader must be a person of action and initiative who will stand up to injustice, pursue peace, and help others in need.

SECTION III. EMPATHY AND COMPASSION

A quality closely related to the humility of Jewish leaders is that of identifying with the plight of others (*nosai b'ol im chaveiro*, literally, bearing the burden with one's fellow). Great historic leaders of Judaism were chosen by virtue of their sensitivity and empathy for others.

1. **Shemot 2:11, with Shemot Rabbah 1:27 – Moshe felt the suffering of his people and helped shoulder their burden. His compassion led to his selection as leader of the Jewish people.**

“And he went out to his brothers and he saw their suffering.”

Shemot Rabbah

What is meant by the words, “And he (Moshe) saw”? He would see their suffering and weep, “Woe is to me for you, would that I could die for you.” For there is no work more strenuous than

וַיֵּצֵא אֶל אֶחָיו וַיֵּרָא בְּסִבְלָתָם.

שמות רבה

מהו וירא שהיה רואה בסבלותם ובוכה ואומר חבל לי עליכם מי יתן מותי עליכם שאין לך מלאכה קשה ממלאכת המיט והיה נותן כתיפיו ומסייע לכל אחד ואחד מהן.

molding bricks; and he used to shoulder the burdens and help each one of them ...

Rabbi Eliezer the son of Rabbi Yose the Galilean said, "He [Moshe] saw a child carrying the load of an adult, and an adult bearing the load of a child; a woman bearing a man's load, and a man bearing the load of a woman; a young man carrying the load of an old man, and an old man with a young man's load. He would overlook his high office [as Prince of Egypt] and go and rearrange their burdens and pretend he was doing it for Pharaoh's sake ... Said the Holy One, Blessed be He, 'You put aside your own affairs and went to share in Israel's suffering and acted like their brother. Therefore, I will put aside the higher and lower worlds and speak only to you.'"

ר' אלעזר בנו של רבי יוסי הגלילי אומר ראה משוי גדול על קטן ומשוי קטן על גדול ומשוי איש על אשה ומשוי אשה על איש ומשוי זקן על בחור ומשוי בחור על זקן והיה מניח דרגון שלו והולך ומיישב להם סבלותיהם ועושה כאלו מסייע לפרעה אמר הקב"ה אתה הנחת עסקיך והלכת לראות בצערן של ישראל ונהגת בהן מנהג אחים, אני מניח את העליונים ואת התחתונים ואדבר עמך.

2. **The Alter of Kelm, Chochmah U'Mussar, Ma'amar 2, p. 8 – The main function of a king is to take care of society. The more he feels the plight of others, the better he can do this.**

... For the role of a king is to deal with the needs of the people and therefore the more one identifies with the plight of others (*nosai b'ol im chaveiro*), the more he is fitting to be a king.

... הרי כי בחינת מלך להיות עוסק בצרכי צבור ולכן מי שהוא יותר נושא בעול ע"ה, מסוגל יותר למלך.

3. **Jonathan Rosenblum, A Truth Shaped By Torah, Jerusalem Post, November 9, 2001 – Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinski and Rav Elazar Menachem Man Shach were worthy successors to Moshe because of their compassion.**

"Moshe grew up and went out to his brothers and he saw their suffering." (Shemot 2:11)

Moshe's preparation for his role as a leader of the Children of Israel began with feeling the suffering of his brethren. That quality of identification with each individual is the hallmark of every true Jewish leader.

Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinski of Vilna, leader of pre-WW II Eastern European Jewry, was once told of an unlearned shoemaker who had lost one of his eight children. Rav Chaim Ozer was inconsolable. Those present could not understand the extent of his tears. Not long before, Rav Chaim Ozer had lost his only child, a daughter who was bitten by a rabid dog shortly after becoming engaged. Yet even then he had not cried so bitterly. Indeed, he had continued writing halachic responsa almost until the moment of her death.

"When my daughter passed away," Rav Chaim Ozer explained, "I could console myself with the knowledge that she was going to a better world. That is clear to me. But I don't know that the World-to-Come is as real to the shoemaker. I'm crying for his pain, not my own."

Rav Elazar Menachem Man Shach, who passed away last Friday, was a worthy heir to the mantle of leadership once worn by Rav Grodzinski. He never sought the role. He needed no other joy than that of studying and teaching Torah, and until the age of 70 he did nothing else.

As a young yeshivah student, he owned only the clothes on his back. His pants were so full of holes that when tested for admission to the Slutsk Yeshivah he wore them inside out to conceal how threadbare they were. When he married, he and his wife did not even own a closet. Two pegs on the wall sufficed for all their possessions.

He became a guide of Jewry around the world because the community sought his guidance. He was neither elected nor appointed. An entire community simply knew, as if instinctively, that he was their shepherd.

The burden was enormous. It meant being available whenever a Jew anywhere in the world needed his advice. Each issue, whether it involved an individual or an entire community, was weighed carefully. He consulted with experts and sought to be continually updated about changing circumstances. When in his late 90s he could no longer give each matter that same thorough consideration, Rav Shach retired from public activity.

They turned to him – individuals, yeshivah heads, and communal leaders – because they knew that whatever he said was the absolute truth as he saw it – a truth shaped only by the Torah to which he had devoted his whole life.

Rav Shach was the antithesis of modern political leaders, zigzagging according to the advice of their pollsters. No suspicion of personal interest attached to him. A wealthy man once offered his son-in-law a \$100,000 donation for the latter's yeshivah if Rav Shach would write a letter of recommendation. Rav Shach refused. A leader, he felt, cannot afford to be beholden to anyone.

Money and honor were meaningless to him. At a time when the media was filled with stories of Rav Shach's political power, a secular journalist who interviewed him was astounded by the way he lived: a cot for a bed, bookshelves made of the packing crates, and a bare bulb in the living room.

The greatness of a Jew can be measured by how many are included within the range of his "I." God Himself is referred to as HaGadol (the Great) because His concern extends to every living being. Similarly, the *gadol hador* (the great man of the generation) is one whose concern encompasses every Jew ...

In his late 80s, Rav Shach required surgery to remove a growth on his leg. The surgeon told him that general anesthesia would be required. Rav Shach would not agree because the anesthesia would cloud his thinking, and he could not afford that. He told the surgeon that he could deal with the pain. Students pinioned his leg to prevent any involuntary movement when the surgeon cut into his flesh.

During the same period in his life, he was informed that a helicopter had crashed, killing four soldiers. He burst into tears ...

His own physical pain he could control, but the pain at the death of a Jew, he could not control.

Perhaps the greatest tragedy of Rav Shach's passing is that so many Jews do not know what a loving father they have lost.

4. **Rabbi Pinchas Miller, Ma'aseh Shehayah, p. 69 – Rabbi Yisrael Salanter took care of a crying baby on Yom Kippur night, rather than pray in shul with the rest of the community.**

The story is told of Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, who once failed to come to shul on the night of Yom Kippur.

האגדה מספרת על רבי ישראל סלנטר כי פעם לא הגיע לבית הכנסת שלו בליל "כל נדרי". חיפשו ומצאו אותו

They searched for him, and finally found him in a Jewish home, not far from the shul, sitting by the cot of a young infant.

On his way to shul, Rabbi Yisrael had heard the sound of a crying child, whose parents had left him sleeping by himself in the house and had gone to shul for Kol Nidrei. Rabbi Yisrael entered the house, sat by the child, and tried to calm him and put him to sleep. In the meantime, he prayed in solitude, and waited until the mother of the child returned home. In his judgment, it was better to show compassion for the child than to pray in *shul* with a quorum.

בבית יהודי, כשהוא יושב על יד עריסתו של ילד קטן.

בדרכו לבית הכנסת שמע קול ילד בוכה, שהוריו עזבוהו לנפשו כשהוא ישן והלכו לבית הכנסת להתפלל. נכנס הרבי לבית, התיישב על יד הילד, וניסה להרגיעו וליישנו. בינתיים התפלל ביחידות, וחיכה עד שחזרה הביתה אם הילד – שכן לדעתו עדיף יותר לרחם על ילד יהודי מלהתפלל בציבור.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION III:

- ∞ Among the most important qualities of a Jewish leader are empathy and compassion. A fundamental prerequisite for leadership is that the leader be attentive to the needs and wants of the people, and seek to meet those needs to the greatest possible extent. We thus find that God chose Jewish leaders by testing how caring and compassionate they were.
- ∞ Throughout the generations, one of the defining character traits of Jewish leaders has been *ahavat Yisrael*, “love of Israel.” As well as possessing encyclopedic knowledge, leading authorities have always been characterized by their concern and depth of feeling for the individual.

SECTION IV. PATIENCE

Another crucial quality required by a leader is patience. As the following sources show, being quick-tempered renders a person unfit for leadership.

1. **Bamidbar (Numbers), with Rashi 27:16 – When Moshe found out that he would not lead the Jewish people into the Land of Israel, he prayed that God replace him with a leader who would have one quality: tolerance.**

Moshe spoke to God, saying, “Let the Omnipotent God of all living souls appoint a man over the community.”

Rashi

“God of all living souls” – Why is this written? Moshe said before God, “The personality of each individual is revealed before You, and they do not resemble each other. Appoint for them a leader who will be able to bear each individual according to his personality.”

וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל יְקֻנֹק לֵאמֹר. יִפְקֹד ה' אֱלֹקֵי הַרוּחֹת לְכֹל בְּשָׂר אִישׁ עַל הָעֵדָה.

רש"י

אלקי הרוחות – למה נאמר? אמר לפניו: רבש"ע גלוי וידוע לפניך דעתו של כל אחד ואחד ואינן דומין זה לזה. מנה עליהם מנהיג שיהא סובל כל אחד ואחד לפי דעתו:

2. **Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifsei Chaim, Midot v'Avodat Hashem, Vol. II, p. 79 – A leader must be patient and calm in order to be able to deal with all types of people.**

A necessary character trait for a king and for good leadership is patience and the ability to hear the claims and complaints of each and every person. For example, at the beginning of Moshe and Aaron's leadership of the Jewish people, "God instructed them concerning the Children of Israel to lead them calmly and with patience" (Rashi, Shemot 6:13). [God instructed Moshe to accept the leadership] even "in the knowledge that they will stone you and curse you [nevertheless you must lead them patiently]" (Rashi, Bamidbar 11:12).

תכונה ... הכרחית למלכות ולמנהיגות טובה [היא] הסבלנות והיכולת להקשיב לטענות ולטרוניות של כל אחד מבני העם, כמו שציוה הקב"ה למשה ואהרן בתחילת הנהגתם את ישראל, "ויצום אל בני ישראל להנהיגם בנחת ויסבול אותם" (שמות ו, יג, ברש"י), ואפילו "על מנת שיהיו סוקלים אתכם ומחרפים אתכם" (רש"י במדבר יא, יב).

The following source is an example of the above.

3. **Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 30b-31a – Hillel (110 BCE-10 CE) was the leader of the generation and could not be angered even by someone who set out purposefully to anger him with inane questions on a busy Erev Shabbat.**

It once happened that two men were talking to each other and made a deal: "Whoever goes and angers Hillel shall receive four hundred zuz." One of them said, "I will go and anger him today."

It was Erev Shabbat, and Hillel was washing his hair. The man went past the door of Hillel's house, and called out, "Who here is Hillel, who here is Hillel?"

Hillel wrapped himself up and went out to him, saying, "My son, what do you want?"

"I have a question to ask," he said.

"Ask, my son."

Thereupon he asked, "Why are the heads of the Babylonians so round?"

"My son, you have asked an important question," he replied. "Because they do not have skillful midwives."

[The man came back twice with similar inane questions, and each time Hillel answered patiently. Finally, the man said:]

מעשה בשני בני אדם שהמרו זה את זה אמרו כל מי שילך ויקניט את הלל יטול ארבע מאות זוז אמר אחד מהם אני אקניטנו.

אותו היום ערב שבת היה והלל חפף את ראשו הלך ועבר על פתח ביתו אמר מי כאן הלל מי כאן הלל?

נתעטף ויצא לקראתו. אמר לו בני מה אתה מבקש?

אמר לו שאלה יש לי לשאול.

אמר לו שאל בני שאל.

מפני מה ראשיהן של בבלים סגולות?

אמר לו בני שאלה גדולה שאלת מפני שאין להם חיות פקחות ...

אמר לו שאלות הרבה יש לי לשאול ומתירא אני שמא תכעוס.

“I have many questions to ask, but fear that you may get angry.”

Hillel tightened his robe, sat before him, and said, “Ask all the questions you have to ask.”

“Are you the Hillel who is called the Leader of Israel?”

“Yes,” Hillel replied.

“If that is you,” he retorted, “may there not be many like you in Israel.”

He said, “Why is that, my son?”

“Because I have lost four hundred zuz through you!”

נתעטף וישב לפניו אמר לו כל שאלות שיש לך לשאול שאל.

אמר לו אתה הוא הלל שקורין אותך נשיא ישראל?

אמר לו הן.

אמר לו אם אתה הוא לא ירבו כמותך בישראל.

אמר לו בני מפני מה אמר לו?

מפני שאבדתי על ירך ארבע מאות זוז.

In more recent times, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, (1895-1986) was the leader of American Jewry. As the next story illustrates, his time was in great demand, yet he had endless patience for an elderly woman who needed reassurance.

Together with his standing as the first and foremost in the Torah world, [Rabbi Moshe Feinstein] never returned a questioner empty-handed. He responded to every question. He turned to every questioner with a shining countenance, irrespective of the severity of the question involved. Yet, when weakness overcame him, he appointed a number of rabbis at the entrance to his office, who would answer questions, only consulting with him in the most difficult of matters.

Every day, an elderly woman used to appear, saying that she had to speak to Rabbi Feinstein about a matter of secrecy. This daily visit became a permanent fixture. After some time, she was asked concerning the daily routine, and it emerged that the woman had experienced a nervous breakdown on account of bad dreams that continually disturbed her. Rabbi Feinstein would try to settle her mind, interpreted all of her dreams for the good, and gave her as much time as was needed. (Rabbi Pinchas Miller, Ma'aseh Shehayah, p. 195)

Since a leader is required to have patience, if he is prone to anger he will be disqualified from leading (I Samuel 16:7, with Rashi). For a full discussion of the importance of patience see the Morasha class *Controlling Anger*.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION IV:

- ∞ The qualities of patience and of avoiding anger are all-important for a king and a leader. It comes as little surprise that many potential leaders were therefore rejected on account of their tendency toward anger. By the same token, those leaders who displayed extraordinary patience rose to extraordinary greatness.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED READING & SOURCES

Rabbi Warren Goldstein, *Defending the Human Spirit: Jewish Law's Vision for a Moral Society*, Feldheim 2006, see Ch. 2, Political Power