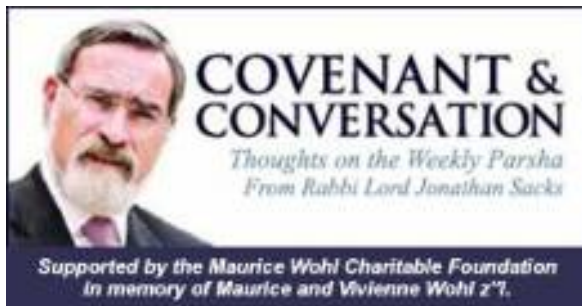


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On Leadership: Power or Influence?

There is a lovely moment in this week's parsha that shows Moses at the height of his generosity as a leader. It comes after one of his deepest moments of despair. The people, as is their wont, have been complaining, this time about the food. They are tired of the manna. They want meat instead. Moses, appalled that they have not yet learned to accept the hardships of freedom, prays to die. "If this is how You are going to treat me," he says to God, "please go ahead and kill me right now – if I have found favour in Your eyes – and do not let me face my own ruin." (Num. 11:15)

God tells him to appoint seventy elders to help him with the burdens of leadership. He does so, and the Divine Spirit rests on them. But it also rests on two other men, Eldad and Medad, who

were not among the chosen seventy. Evidently Moses had selected six men out of each of the twelve tribes, making 72, and then removed Eldad and Medad by lot. Nonetheless, they too were caught up in the moment of inspiration.¹

Joshua, Moses' deputy, warns that this is a potential threat, but Moses replies with splendid magnanimity: "Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord's people were Prophets and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon each of them!" (Num. 11:29)

This contrasts sharply with Moses' conduct later when his leadership is challenged by Korach and his followers. On that occasion he showed no gentleness or generosity. To the contrary, in effect he prays that the ground swallow them up, that "they go down alive into the realm of the dead." (Num. 16:28-30) He is sharp, decisive and unforgiving. Why the different response to Korach on the one hand, and Eldad and Medad on the other?

To understand this, it is essential to grasp the difference between two concepts often confused, namely power and influence. We tend to think of them as similar if not identical. People of power have influence. People of influence have power. But the two are quite distinct and operate by a different logic, as a simple thought experiment will show.

Imagine you have total power. Whatever you say, goes. Then one day you decide to share your power with nine others. You now have, at best, one-tenth of the power you had before. Now imagine instead that you have a certain measure of influence. You decide to share that influence with nine others, whom you make your partners. You now have ten times the influence you had before, because instead of

just you there are now ten people delivering the message.

Power works by division, influence by multiplication. Power, in other words, is a zero-sum game: the more you share, the less you have. Influence is a non-zero game: the more you share, the more you have.

Throughout his forty years at the head of the nation, Moses held two different leadership roles. He was a Prophet, teaching Torah to the Israelites and communicating with God. He was also the functional equivalent of a king, leading the people on their journeys, directing their destiny and supplying them with their needs. The one leadership role he did not have was that of High Priest, which went to his brother Aaron.

We can see this duality later in the narrative when he inducts Joshua as his successor. God commands him: ‘Take Joshua son of Nun, a man of spirit, and *lay your hand on him ... Give him some of your honour (hod)* so that the whole Israelite community will obey him. (Num. 27:18-20)

Note the two different acts. One, “lay your hand [*vesamachta*] on him,” is the origin of term *s'michah*, whereby a Rabbi ordains a pupil, granting him the authority to make rulings in his own right. The Rabbis saw their role as a continuation of that of the Prophets (“Moses received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua; Joshua to the elders; the elders to the Prophets; and the Prophets handed it down to the men of the Great Assembly,” Mishnah Avot 1:1). By this act of *s'michah*, Moses was handing on to Joshua his role as Prophet.

By the other act, “Give him some of your honour,” he was inducting him into the role of

king. The Hebrew word *hod*, honour, is associated with kingship, as in the biblical phrase *hod malchut*, “the honour of kingship” (Dan. 11:21; 1 Chronicles, 29:25).

Kings had power – including that of life and death (see Joshua 1:18). Prophets had none, but they had influence, not just during their lifetimes but, in many cases, to this day. To paraphrase Kierkegaard: when a King dies his power ends. When a Prophet dies his influence begins.

Now we see exactly why Moses’ reaction was so different in the case of Eldad and Medad, and that of Korach and his followers. Eldad and Medad sought and received no power. They merely received the same influence – the Divine Spirit that emanated from Moses. They became Prophets. That is why Moses said, “I wish that all the Lord’s people were Prophets and that the Lord would put His Spirit on them.” Prophecy is not a zero-sum game. When it comes to leadership-as-influence, the more we share the more we have.

Korach, or at least some of his followers, sought power, and power is a zero-sum game. When it comes to *malchut*, the leadership of power, the rule is: “There is one leader for the generation, not two.”² In kingship, a bid for power is an attempted coup d’etat and has to be resisted by force. Otherwise the result is a division of the nation into two, as happened after the death of King Solomon. Moses could not let the challenge of Korach go unchallenged without fatefully compromising his own authority.

So Judaism clearly demarcates between leadership as influence and leadership by power. It is unqualified in its endorsement of the first, and deeply ambivalent about the second. Tanach

is a sustained polemic against the use of power. All power, according to the Torah, rightly belongs to God. The Torah recognises the need, in an imperfect world, for the use of coercive force in maintaining the rule of law and the defence of the realm. Hence its endorsement of the appointment of a King, should the people so desire it.³ But this is clearly a concession, not an ideal.⁴

The real leadership embraced by Tanach and by rabbinic Judaism is that of influence, above all that of Prophets and teachers. As we have noted many times before, that is the ultimate accolade given to Moses by tradition. We know him as *Moshe Rabbeinu*, Moses our teacher. Moses was the first of a long line of figures in Jewish history – among them Ezra, Hillel, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, Rabbi Akiva, the Sages of the Talmud and the scholars of the Middle Ages – who represent one of Judaism's most revolutionary ideas: *the teacher as hero*.

Judaism was the first and greatest civilisation to predicate its very survival on education, houses of study, and learning as a religious experience higher even than prayer.⁵ The reason is this: leaders are people able to mobilise others to act in certain ways. If they achieve this only because they hold power over them, this means treating people as means, not ends - as things not persons. Not accidentally, the single greatest writer on leadership as power was Machiavelli.

The other approach is to speak to people's needs and aspirations, and teach them how to achieve these things together as a group. That is done through the power of a vision, force of personality, the ability to articulate shared ideals in a language with which people can identify, and the capacity to "raise up many disciples"

who will continue the work into the future. Power diminishes those on whom it is exercised. Influence and education lift and enlarge them.

Judaism is a sustained protest against what Hobbes called the "general inclination of all mankind," nameless "a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death."⁶ That may be the reason why Jews have seldom exercised power for prolonged periods of time but have had an influence on the world out of all proportion to their numbers.

Not all of us have power, but we all have influence. That is why we can each be leaders. The most important forms of leadership come not with position, title or robes of office, not with prestige and power, but with the willingness to work with others to achieve what we cannot do alone; to speak, to listen, to teach, to learn, to treat other people's views with respect even if they disagree with us, to explain patiently and cogently why we believe what we believe and why we do what we do; to encourage others, praise their best endeavours and challenge them to do better still. **Always choose influence rather than power. It helps change people into people who can change the world.**

AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

1. What is Joshua's concern about Eldad and Medad?
2. Why does Moses respond to Joshua that he wishes every person could become a Prophet?
3. According to Rabbi Sacks, we *all* have influence. How will you apply your influence to make a positive impact in this world?

NOTES

1. See Sanhedrin 17a
2. Sanhedrin 8a.
3. Deuteronomy 17:15-20; I Samuel 8.
4. So, at any rate, is the view of Ibn Ezra, Rabbeinu Bachya and Abarbanel.
5. See Shabbat 10a.
6. Hobbes, *The Leviathan*, part 1, ch. 11.



Commandments: Opportunities, Not Burdens

Bamidbar, 9:6-7: “There were men who had been contaminated by a human corpse and could not make the Pascal Lamb Offering on that day: so, they approached Moshe on that day. Those men said to him, ‘we are contaminated through a human corpse. Why should we be diminished by not offering Hashem’s Offering in its appointed time among the Children of Israel?’”

Rashi, 9:7: Dh: Lama nigra: “...it was fitting that this portion should have been written by Moshe like the rest of the whole Torah. Yet, these [men] merited that it be said through them, because we give merit to those who are deserving.”

The Torah relates that at the time of the offering of the Pascal Lamb Offering, there were a number of men who were unable to perform the Mitzva because they were impure due to their involvement with a human corpse.¹ However,

they were unsatisfied with the fact that they could not perform the Pascal Lamb Offering through no fault of their own, and asked for an opportunity to fulfil it.

The Seforno² elaborates on their exact complaint based on the Talmud³ that explains why they were impure. The Talmud brings two opinions: One holds that it was because they were the bearers of the coffin of Yosef. The second opinion is that they had come upon an unattended, unidentified corpse and had fulfilled the commandment to bury it. Either way, they became ineligible to do the mitzvah of the Pascal Lamb Offering because of their involvement in a different commandment.

The Seforno explains that their issue was that it was not fair that their performance of one commandment prevented them from performing another commandment. The Sifri describes these men as “*bnei adam kesheirim v’charedim al HaMitzvos*’ – righteous men who were careful about commandments. Rashi relates that these men merited a great reward – that the Torah records that the mitzvah of Pesach Sheini, the Second Pascal offering, was brought because of their initiative.

Rabbi Meir Rubman⁴ asks why it is so obvious that they were such great people from the fact that they complained about their inability to do this mitzvah? He answers by citing the Talmud in Brachot:⁵ The Talmud compares earlier generations to the later generations in the context of the obligation to take *Maaser* (tithes) on one’s produce. If a person brings his produce through the doors of his home, then he is obligated to take tithes. However, if he brings it through the garden or something similar, then he is exempt.

In earlier generations, people would go out of their way to bring their produce through the doors of their houses in order to obligate themselves in taking tithes, even when they would otherwise bring them through the garden. However, in later times, the people acted in the exact opposite manner and they would bring the produce through their gardens in order to exempt themselves from taking tithes, even when otherwise, they would bring them through their homes.⁶

Rabbi Rubman explains the difference between the two generations. The later generations feared God and they were very careful to avoid sinning, and they exempted themselves to avoid the risk of stumbling in the laws of separating tithes. However, the earlier generations were on a higher level of love of God, because one who loves God does not try to exempt himself from opportunities to do His will. On the contrary, he strives for ways to connect to God through Mitzvot. In this way, the later generations were on a lower level in that their love of God was not great enough to motivate them to grab as many Mitzvot as possible.

The question arises as to why the earlier generations were so much greater than the later generations in this area? The key to answering this question appears to be in another comparison that the same section of Talmud makes between the two generations: It states that the later generations made their work 'keva' – (fixed) and their Torah 'arai' (temporary) while the earlier generations made their Torah fixed and their work temporary. This means that for the earlier generation, their main focus was in the spiritual realm, and their involvement in the physical world was merely a means to and end of focusing on spirituality. In

contrast, the primary focus of the later generations was on succeeding in the material realm and their spiritual accomplishments were secondary.

It seems that the two comparisons go hand in hand: When a person's main goal is to succeed in the physical realm, then he will not strive to grab every opportunity that arises in the spiritual realm. Rather he will try to fulfil what he is obligated to do but no more. Consequently, he will happily exempt himself from spiritual obligations in order to gain materially.

In contrast, when a person's ultimate purpose is to grow in his relationship with God, then he will grab every chance to do so. Consequently, he will strive to obligate himself in Mitzvot because he does not see them as a yoke that has to be fulfilled, rather as an opportunity to achieve one's goal in life – closeness to God.

Returning to the people who complained about missing the opportunity of the Pascal Lamb offering. The fact that they were so upset about missing this Mitzva demonstrates were comparable to the early generations in that they yearned for opportunities to do Mitzvot and were not looking to exempt themselves when possible.

The following story demonstrates that even in more recent generations, some Tzaddikim reached this level. Rabbi Yissachar Frand relates that he read this story of a young Yeshiva student who was learning in Radin, where the Chofetz Chaim lived.

One Thursday night, he studied Torah until the early morning and was on his way home from the study hall. It was a snowy, cold night. The young man was walking home late at night and

saw another man walking up and down the street. When he came a little closer, he noticed that the person was none other than the Chofetz Chaim. The Chofetz Chaim asked him "What are you doing up so late at night? It is cold. Go to sleep!" The boy returned to the host where he was staying, which happened to be the house of the sister of the Chofetz Chaim.

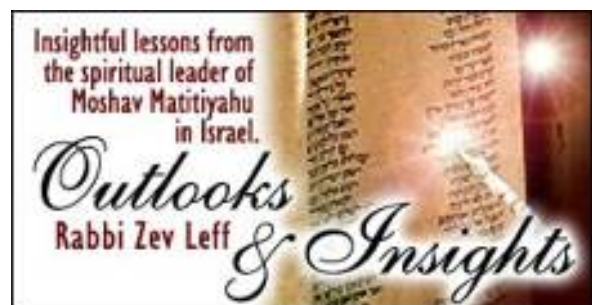
The boy woke up Friday morning and told his host – "You know, last night I saw an amazing sight. It was two o'clock in the morning and your brother was running back and forth in the street. What was he doing there?" The sister told the young man, "This is already the third night in a row he is doing this. He has been trying to say Kiddush Levana (the Blessing over the New Moon) for the last three nights. There was not a clear night during those days of the Polish winter to enable him to see the moon."

Rabbi Frand observes, comparing this to the impure men of the Parsha:

"The Chofetz Chaim was walking the streets at two o'clock in the morning on a cold snowy night. He told the student, "Do not be crazy. Go home already." but he kept walking the streets trying to catch a glimpse of the new moon. Our attitude – in the winter months – is "Nu, this month we will not be able to say Kiddush Levana. There is always next month." It is not our fault. It does not bother us in the slightest. The Chofetz Chaim's attitude was that of the Temei Mes (people who were impure because of contact with a corpse) who complained to Moshe. Why should we miss out?

The Chofetz Chaim clearly reached a very high level, but the obvious lesson to be derived here for each person on his level is that the attitude of trying to fulfil one's obligations demonstrates a fundamentally flawed outlook on our relationship with God. Such a person views it as a secondary obligation that must be overcome in order to enable a person to achieve his 'other' goals such as financial success. By studying the Torah attitude in this area, and with guidance from Torah scholars, can a person begin to genuinely shift his outlook to somewhat resemble those of the men who brought about the commandment of Pesach Sheini.

1. The Talmud brings two opinions as to why they were impure. One was because they were the bearers of the coffin of Yosef. The second opinion is that they had come upon an unattended, unidentified corpse and had fulfilled the Mitzva of burying it.
2. Seforno, Bamidbar, 9:7.
3. Sukkah, 25a.
4. Zichron Meir, cited in Lekach Tov, Bamidbar, pp.81-82.
5. Brachot, 35b.
6. This interpretation is based on the Yismach Moshe, Beshalach.



Consistency and Faithfulness

"When the Ark would travel, Moses would say, 'Arise God, and let Your foes be scattered, let those who hate You flee from before You.' And when it rested, he would say, 'Return, God, to the myriad thousands of Israel.' " (Numbers 10:35-36)

According to one opinion in the Talmud (Shabbos 116a), these two verses are set off by inverted *nun* letters, to constitute a break between three episodes in which the Jewish people sinned.

The first of the three episodes (according to Tosafos and Nachmanides) was when the Jewish people left Mount Sinai "as children who flee from school," i.e., relieved that they would receive no more mitzvot. Later, after traveling without stop for three days, the people complained and bemoaned the frantic pace at which God was driving them. The third of their sins was complaining about the manna and demanding meat.

Since a threefold repetition constitutes a pattern in Jewish law, the Torah did not record these three events in succession, without a break in between. Still to be explained, however, is why the division falls between the first two episodes and not between the second and the third.

To answer this last question, we must understand the importance of consistency in our service of God. When Joseph revealed himself to his brothers with the words, "*I am Joseph; is my father still alive?*" the brothers were so overwhelmed that they could not answer him. The Midrash comments, "Woe to us from the Day of Judgment and the day of reproof, for if the brothers could not answer the rebuke of Joseph, their younger brother, how much more so will we be overwhelmed by God's reproof when He in the future rebukes each one according to his deeds."

Bais HaLevi explains that the essence of Joseph's rebuke was pointing out the inconsistency of their actions. Until the moment Joseph revealed himself, Yehudah was pleading

with Joseph to take into account the suffering of their aged father and therefore free Benjamin. To this Joseph replied, "I am Joseph. Where was your concern for our father's pain and sorrow when you sold me and convinced him that I was dead? Is he still alive after that? When it is convenient, you are concerned with our father's welfare, and when it serves your purposes, you are oblivious."

FISHING EXPERTISE

The Midrash (Tana D'vei Eliyahu) records a similar instance of rebuke. Elijah the Prophet found himself mocked by an ignorant boor, who did not even know the *aleph-bet*. Elijah asked the man if he did not fear for the day the Heavenly Court would ask him why he did not learn Torah.

The man replied that he was not afraid because he was not given the intelligence to learn and therefore could not be blamed. Elijah then asked him to describe how he made his living, and the man commenced an animated description of how he made fishing nets and set them out in the most efficient possible fashion.

At the end of this discussion, Elijah told him, "For fishing you have wisdom, and for Torah, which is even more crucial to life, you do not?" Immediately the man burst into tears at the realization that he had refuted himself.

Elijah concluded by pointing out how rampant is such inconsistency. There are those who will plead before the Heavenly Court that they were not given the means to give *tzedakah*, charity. They will be shown how for their own personal pleasures the money was somehow found. Others will defend their lack of Torah study on the grounds that they were too busy making a

living. They will be shown the time spent doing nothing or in idle chatter. There is no more telling refutation of all our excuses than those we ourselves provide.

RULES OF SCRUTINY

The ideal service of God is described as "*all your days*" – without interruption, with consistency and constancy (Ibn Ezra to Deut. 19:9). The Talmud (Brachot 6a) says that if someone comes regularly to shul and one day is absent, God inquires as to his absence, and if he has no acceptable excuse, he is punished. The person who never attends shul is not scrutinized in the same manner, for he has never exhibited the capacity to attend regularly.

We can now understand why the Torah separated between the eager departure of the Jewish people from Sinai and their complaints about the swift pace at which they were moving. When the Jewish people ran to avoid a proliferation of additional mitzvot, God observed, "My children, if you have the energy to run from Mount Sinai, let us harness that energy and direct your running to your final destination, Israel."

Immediately the Jewish people complained that they lacked the strength and stamina to run. That was the ultimate self-condemnation – inconsistency. To run from Torah you have the stamina, and yet to run to Israel you lack that same capacity. To minimize the inconsistency involved, the Torah distinguished between these two episodes.

THE LETTER 'NUN'

The letter *nun* represents faithfulness and consistency (Talmud – Shabbos 31a). The inverted *nuns*, therefore, represent inconsistency

and self-contradiction.

The two verses set off by the inverted *nuns* describe the antidote to that inconsistency. When Moses saw the Cloud of Glory begin to ascend and depart, signaling God's desire that the Jewish people resume their journey, he proclaimed "*Arise, God.*" This proclamation was a confirmation of God's will and an expression of Moses' desire to subjugate his desires to God's. Similarly, when the Ark came to rest, Moses again proclaimed, "*Return, God...*"

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch comments that this parsha marks the end of one epoch of Jewish history and the beginning of another, leading to the sin of the spies and culminating in the destruction of the Temple and exile. The root of all this misfortune was the inability to be consistent in our service of God.

May we strive to correct this flaw so that the inverted *nuns* are once more made upright, as they are in the ultimate expression of total devotion. Then we will merit two other words that also begin with "*be comforted, My nation,*" with the ultimate Divine redemption.



Hungering for Meat

Greetings from the holy city of Jerusalem!

In this week's parsha, we find one of the most

perplexing passages in the Torah. The Jewish people in the desert are suddenly overwhelmed by a craving for meat (Numbers 11:4). God is "angered" by the people's desire, but nevertheless promises to provide an abundance of meat for them - an entire month's worth, "until it comes out of your noses" (Numbers 11:20).

At this point, Moses asks God a series of seemingly outrageous questions: "I am living amidst 600,000 people who are traveling by foot, and You say You will supply a month's worth of meat for them? Can enough sheep and cattle be slaughtered for them? Would all the fish of the sea be enough for them?" God responds to Moses's questions, "Is My Hand short? Now you will see whether I am good for My word or not" (Numbers 11:21-23).

It is difficult to understand how Moses, who had the closest possible relationship with the Divine, could have explicitly doubted God's ability to provide. If God created the entire world *ex nihilo*, why should it be difficult for Him to provide sufficient meat for the Jewish people? Although many commentators grapple with this issue, we will present the opinion of the Da'at Zekainim (Numbers 11:23).

The generation of the desert had a unique law that prohibited the slaughter of meat solely for personal consumption. Therefore, a person who wanted to eat meat was obligated to bring an offering to the Tabernacle. He would slaughter an animal, place a portion of the meat on the altar, and give a portion to the Kohanim. Only the remaining third of the meat belonged to the owner who had brought the offering.

The Priests were required to finish their portion of meat before dawn of the following day. Any

meat that was leftover at daybreak became invalid and had to be burned - an act that ideally was to be avoided. Therefore, the Priests made every effort to consume the meat within the appointed time.

Based on these laws, the Da'at Zekeinim explain Moses's words in the following way. God said that He would provide the people with a month's worth of meat in one day. Moses is certain that God can fulfill His word - but imagine hundreds and thousands of people suddenly converging at once on the Tabernacle with their animals! There were only three Kohanim (Aaron and his two sons) to serve the entire Jewish people. How would it be possible for them to eat such a vast quantity of sacrificial meat before dawn?

Further, according to the Da'at Zekeinim, Moses's question, "Can You provide enough fish for them?" (Numbers 11:22) is to be read as a statement. Moses was implying, "If You had promised to provide fish for them, they would be able to eat whatever they wanted, since we don't bring offerings from fish. But because You said, 'I will provide meat for them,' they will need to bring a sacrifice! How can You expect Aaron and his sons to eat so much meat within the allotted time?"

God responds, "Is My Hand short?" When God said He would provide meat, He meant quail: a type of bird from which no offering is brought! Therefore, this would circumvent any possibility of leftover meat.

Fowl is considered to have the halachic status of meat, but the origins of this categorization are debatable. Was this law derived directly from the Torah, or did it result from a later decision of the Sages? From this passage we see that when God said "meat," He was referring to

quail. According to the opinion of the Da'at Zekeinim, we could therefore suggest that fowl's status as meat is given directly by the Torah.

[This is the view held by Tosefot (Chullin 104b). For further analysis, see Maimonides (Mamrim 2:9), Yoram Deah 87:3 and Shach 4.]

The Da'at Zekeinim, by understanding the dialogue this way, justify Moses's surprising words. Moses never doubted God's ability to provide. If anything, the limitation was with the people.

As we sit down at our dinner table, may we enjoy some delicious meat and some meaty words of Torah, and in this way have a full and complete experience.

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