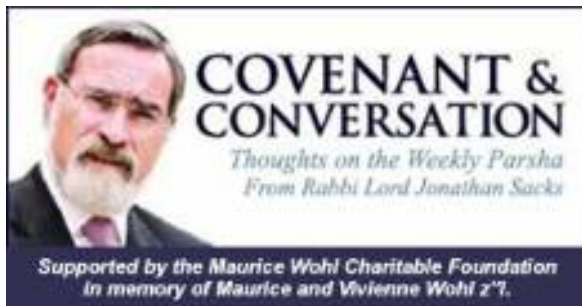


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On Leadership: Conflict Resolution

One of the hardest tasks of a leader - from prime ministers to parents - is conflict resolution. Yet it is also the most vital. Where there is leadership, there is long-term cohesiveness within the group, whatever the short-term problems. Where there is a lack of leadership - where leaders lack authority, grace, generosity of spirit and the ability to respect positions other than their own - then there is divisiveness, rancour, back-biting, resentment, internal politics and a lack of trust. Leaders are people who put the interests of the group above those of any subsection of the group. They care for, and inspire others to care for, the common good.

That is why an episode in this week's parsha is of the highest consequence. It arose like this. The Israelites were on the last stage of their

journey to the promised land. They were now situated on the east bank of the Jordan, within sight of their destination. Two of the tribes, Reuben and Gad, who had large herds and flocks of cattle, felt that the land they were currently on was ideal for their purposes. It was good grazing country. So they approached Moses and asked for permission to stay there rather than take up their share in the land of Israel. They said: "If we have found favour in your eyes, let this land be given to your servants as our possession. Do not make us cross the Jordan" (Num. 32:5).

Moses was instantly alert to the danger. The two tribes were putting their own interests above those of the nation as a whole. They would be seen as abandoning the nation at the very time they were needed most. There was a war - in fact a series of wars - to be fought if the Israelites were to inherit the promised land. As Moses put it to the tribes: "Should your fellow Israelites go to war while you sit here? Why do you discourage the Israelites from crossing over into the land the LORD has given them?" (Num. 32:6-7).

The proposal was potentially disastrous. Moses reminded the men of Reuben and Gad what had happened in the incident of the spies. The spies demoralised the people, ten of them saying that they could not conquer the land. The inhabitants were too strong. The cities were impregnable. The result of that one moment was to condemn an entire generation to die in the wilderness and to delay the eventual conquest by forty years. "And here you are, a brood of sinners, standing in the place of your fathers and making the LORD even more angry with Israel. If you turn away from following him, he will again leave all this people in the wilderness, and you will be

the cause of their destruction" (Num. 32:14-15). Moses was blunt, honest and confrontational.

What then followed is a role model in negotiation and conflict resolution. The Reubenites and Gadites recognised the claims of the people as a whole and the justice of Moses' concerns. They propose a compromise. Let us make provisions for our cattle and our families, they say, and the men will then accompany the other tribes across the Jordan. They will fight alongside them. They will even go ahead of them. They will not return to their cattle and families until all the battles have been fought, the land has been conquered, and the other tribes have received their inheritance. Essentially they invoke what would later become a principle of Jewish law: *zeh neheneh ve-zeh lo chaser*, meaning, an act is permissible if "one side gains and the other side does not lose." (1) We will gain, say the two tribes, by having land good for our cattle, but the nation as a whole will not lose because we will be in the army, we will be in the front line, and we will stay there until the war has been won.

Moses recognises the fact that they have met his objections. He restates their position to make sure he and they have understood the proposal and they are ready to stand by it. He extracts from them agreement to a *tenai kaful*, a double condition, both positive and negative: If we do this, these will be the consequences, but if we fail to do this, those will be the consequences. He leaves them no escape from their commitment. The two tribes agree. Conflict has been averted. The Reubenites and Gadites achieve what they want but the interests of the other tribes and of the nation as a whole have been secured. It was a model negotiation.

Quite how justified were Moses' concerns became apparent many years later. The Reubenites and Gadites did indeed fulfil their promise in the days of Joshua. The rest of the tribes conquered and settled Israel while they (together with half the tribe of Manasseh) established their presence in Trans-Jordan. Despite this, within a brief space of time there was almost civil war.

Joshua 22 describes how, returning to their families and settling their land, the Reubenites and Gadites built "an altar to the Lord" on the east side of the Jordan. Seeing this as an act of secession, the rest of the Israelites prepared to do battle against them. Joshua, in a striking act of diplomacy, sent Pinhas, the former zealot, now man of peace, to negotiate. He warned them of the terrible consequences of what they had done by, in effect, creating a religious centre outside the land of Israel. It would split the nation in two.

The Reubenites and Gadites made it clear that this was not their intention at all. To the contrary, they themselves were worried that in the future, the rest of the Israelites would see them living across the Jordan and conclude that they no longer wanted to be part of the nation. That is why they had built the altar, not to offer sacrifices, not as a rival to the nation's sanctuary, but merely as a symbol and a sign to future generations that they too were Israelites. Pinhas and the rest of the delegation were satisfied with this answer, and once again civil war was averted.

The negotiation between Moses and the two tribes in our parsha follows closely the principles arrived at by the Harvard Negotiation Project, set out by Roger Fisher and William

Ury in their classic text, *Getting to Yes*.(2) Essentially they came to the conclusion that a successful negotiation must involve four processes:

1. *Separate the people from the problem.* There are all sorts of personal tensions in any negotiation. It is essential that these be cleared away first so that the problem can be addressed objectively.

2. *Focus on interests, not positions.* It is easy for any conflict to turn into a zero-sum game: if I win, you lose. If you win, I lose. That is what happens when you focus on positions and the question becomes, "Who wins?" By focusing not on positions but on interests, the question becomes, "Is there a way of achieving what each of us wants?"

3. *Invent options for mutual gain.* This is the idea expressed halakhically as *zeh neheneh ve-zeh neheneh*, "Both sides benefit." This comes about because the two sides usually have different objectives, neither of which excludes the other.

4. *Insist on objective criteria.* Make sure that both sides agree in advance to the use of objective, impartial criteria to judge whether what has been agreed has been achieved. Otherwise, despite all apparent agreement the dispute will continue, both sides insisting that the other has not done what was promised.

Moses does all four. First he separates the people from the problem by making it clear to the Reubenites and Gadites that the issue has nothing to do with who they are, and everything

to do with the Israelites' experience in the past, specifically the episode of the spies. Regardless of who the ten negative spies were and which tribes they came from, everyone suffered. No one gained. The problem is not about this tribe or that but about the nation as a whole.

Second, he focused on interests not positions. The two tribes had an interest in the fate of the nation as a whole. If they put their personal interests first, God would become angry and the entire people would be punished, the Reubenites and Gadites among them. It is striking how different this negotiation was from that of Korach and his followers. There, the whole argument was about positions, not interests - about who was entitled to be a leader. The result was collective tragedy.

Third, the Reubenites and Gadites then invented an option for mutual gain. If you allow us to make temporary provisions for our cattle and children, they said, we will not only fight in the army. We will be its advance guard. We will benefit, knowing that our request has been granted. The nation will benefit by our willingness to take on the most demanding military task.

Fourth, there was an agreement on objective criteria. The Reubenites and Gadites would not return to the east bank of the Jordan until all the other tribes were safely settled in their territories. And so it happened, as narrated in the book of Joshua:

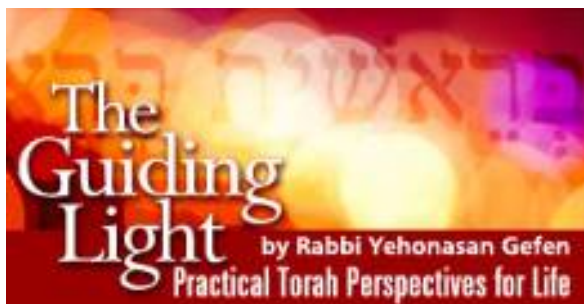
Then Joshua summoned the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh and said to them, "You have done all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded, and you have obeyed me in everything I commanded. For

a long time now-to this very day-you have not deserted your fellow Israelites but have carried out the mission the LORD your God gave you. Now that the LORD your God has given them rest as he promised, return to your homes in the land that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you on the other side of the Jordan. (Joshua 22:1-4)

This was, in short, a model negotiation, a sign of hope after the many destructive conflicts in the book of Bamidbar, as well as a standing alternative to the many later conflicts in Jewish history that had such appalling outcomes.

Note that Moses succeeds, not because he is weak, not because he is willing to compromise on the integrity of the nation as a whole, not because he uses honeyed words and diplomatic evasions, but because he is honest, principled, and focused on the common good. We all face conflicts in our lives. This is how to resolve them.

1. Baba Kama 20b.
2. Roger Fisher and William Ury, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*, Random House Business, 2011.



Our Attitude to the Past

Bamidbar, 33:1: “These are the journeys of the Children of Israel who left the land of Mitzrayim

according to their groups, in the hands of Moshe and Aaron.”

Bamidbar Rabbah, 23:3: “It is analogous to a King whose son was sick. He took him to one place to heal him. When they returned, his father began to recount all the journeys, and said, “here we slept, here we were cold, here you had a headache.” So too, the Holy One, Blessed is He, said to Moshe, “recount for them all the places where they angered Me”, therefore it says, ‘these are the journeys’”.

In this week’s Torah portion, the Torah recounts the 42 encampments that the Jewish people stopped at during their long journey from Egypt to the Land of Israel. Why is it so important for the Torah to devote so many words to seemingly insignificant information?

The Midrash explains with an analogy of a King whose son is sick, and so the King takes him to a place where he could be healed. When they return, the King recounts each journey and what happened there, such as when the child had a headache. The Midrash concludes that in a similar way, God recounts where the Jewish people angered Him.

The Midrash is explaining that God wanted to recount the places where the Jewish people sinned and their consequential punishments. This only begs the question: what was the benefit of reiterating such unpleasant events?

The Limmudei Nissan¹ answers that this comes to teach an important idea about how people look back at the less than glorious moments in their life’s history. The natural tendency of most people is to forget their inauspicious history and to wipe the slate clean. The Torah teaches that

this is an erroneous attitude. It is important to remember our past even if that past includes incidents that do not make us proud.

Why is this the case?

One reason is that the only way we will know how to be better in the future is to learn from our past. Rabbi Yissachar Frand cites a famous phrase of the American philosopher George Santayana “Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it.” In this vein, the reason the Torah catalogues all encampments is to teach us, in Rabbi Frand’s words:

“Yes, there were moments in your past in which you fell down, but you were able to bounce back from those moments. Yes, there were moments in your history in which you did not act properly, but you were able to pull yourselves out by your strength of character. Those are important lessons that a person has to know. A person is the sum total of his experiences — good and bad. To have an attitude “I just want to forget about the past” is going to doom a person to failure again. The Torah feels it is worthwhile to enumerate the 42 encampments to teach this lesson — that life is a journey. The journey is sometimes not a straight line — it has ups and downs, peaks and valleys. There are glorious moments and less than glorious moments. We should not erase any of them from our memory banks.

Rabbi Frand then relates the following story in connection with this idea. Someone once asked him a question. He had a child that had a very difficult time becoming engaged and married. In the course of the several years that it took this

person to become engaged, the parents compiled a loose-leaf notebook of all the different suggestions for dating that were proposed and considered over the years. It became quite a thick compendium. The father said to himself that when his child finally becomes engaged, “I am going to burn this notebook.”

This was not a totally novel idea. It was the ‘custom’ among some people to burn their mortgage document once they had finally finished paying it up. It is also still common for some school students to burn their study books when they graduate. These actions symbolize a view that this part of a person’s life is gladly over and is being erased from history. This is how the parent felt with regard the shidduchim of his child.

Rabbi Frand told him that he was not sure that this was the correct Torah approach: “I told him that this experience was a journey in which there were ups and downs (probably mostly downs), but it was a journey that a person hopefully grew from. It is not something to destroy as if it never happened.”

Rabbi Frand’s proof was the lesson of the 42 encampments. God wanted the Jewish people to remember when they made mistakes and when they endured difficulty and failure. These events did not become superfluous once the Jewish people finally entered Israel. Rather they contributed to the building of the Jewish nation and in the same way a person’s own history makes him.

Rabbi Frand advised this parent that in spite of the fact that there were painful moments associated with this notebook, the chronicles of the trying period in which his child was trying to find their destined partner is nevertheless not

something that should be burnt. They should be stored and be available so that from time to time it will be possible for both the child and the parent to say, "Look what I went through and look from where I have come."

May we all merit to learn from our past, even when it was not so pleasant.

1. Written by Rav Nissan Alpert zt"l, cited by Rav Yissachar Frand, shlit'a.



In the Eyes of Man and God

The children of Gad and the children of Reuben came and spoke to Elazar the Kohen, and to the leaders of the assembly, saying, "Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, and Elealeh, and Sebam, Nebo, and Beon. The Land that God smote before the assembly of Israel – it is a land for flocks, and your servants have flocks." (Numbers 32:2-4)

Both the request of Gad and Reuven for land on the eastern side of the Jordan, and Moses' response, are very difficult to understand for a variety of reasons. They presented their request in a strange order. First they presented Moses with a list of cities. Then they added that the land was good pasture and they had large flocks.

This is followed by a closed paragraph (*parasha stuma*), as if that particular topic was done and a

new one begun. Only after this break do they request openly what was seemingly on their minds from the beginning: "*Give us this land and permit us to stay on this side of the Jordan*" (Numbers 42:5). They should have first made their request, explained it, and only then presented a list of cities.

Moses' response also defies understanding. First, he appeared to assume that they were afraid to enter the Land of Israel like the spies. There is seemingly no attempt to judge them favorably; they are simply accused without any probing of their motivations.

Only when they offered to leave their wives, children and cattle in fortified cities in Transjordan, did Moses accept their offer. This, too, is puzzling in light of the fact that the principal fear of the spies was that their wives and children would die in the conquest of the land, and now Gad and Reuven were trying to exempt theirs from danger. If Moses suspected them of sharing the spirit of the spies, why permit them to leave their families safely in Transjordan?

DEMORALIZING EFFECT

It appears to me that the key to understanding this sequence lies in the precise language of Moses' answer. If Gad and Reuven kept their word to go before the rest of the nation into war, Moses told them, "*You will be pure and guiltless in the eyes of God and in the eyes of the Jewish people*" (Numbers 32:22). The Sages derive from these words that a person must not act in such a way as to cause others to suspect him of sin. The entire concept of *mar'is ayin* is based on this source. Although a Jew is required to judge his fellow Jew favorably, that is not a

license to give rise to needless suspicions which will cause others to leap to false conclusions.

In this light, the entire exchange takes on an entirely new cast. The two tribes realized that their request could raise suspicions. That is why they first hinted to Moses rather than making an express request. They hoped that Moses would of his own accord make the suggestion that they remain in Transjordan, and thus absolve them. Therefore they began with a list of the cities, in the hopes that Moses would himself recognize the suitability of these rich pasture lands for their large herds.

When Moses remained silent, they became more explicit, adding that these cities were surrounded by rich pasture lands and that they had large herds of cattle. At that point they ended their presentation, as indicated by the closed paragraph. Only because Moses still remained silent did they have no choice but to make their final request.

For his part, Moses understood their intentions from the beginning. But he felt that no matter who actually verbalized the suggestion of remaining in Transjordan, it would have a demoralizing effect. He did not think that their actual intentions were bad, but wanted Gad and Reuven to understand how suspicious their request appeared on the surface. Because the suspicious appearance of cowardice was the entire problem Moses was combating, it was entirely sufficient for the two tribes to offer to lead the Jewish armies into battle to remove that suspicion.

UNWARRANTED SUSPICIONS

We learn from this parsha how careful one must

be to take into consideration the effect of his actions on others. Maharil Diskin explains that we judge others favorably for our own sake as well as theirs. Most people are highly influenced by the behavior they witness. When we judge what others do in a favorable light, we raise the level of our environment in our own eyes and prevent it from negatively influencing us. Moreover, one must not be a stumbling block to others by causing them to harbor unwarranted suspicions.

The Mishnah (Avot 2:1) tells us that we must choose a path of service of God that brings glory and approbation both from God and man. Torah and mitzvot are not one's own private domain; one has an obligation to strengthen others' Torah and mitzvot by being a good example.

Perhaps this is the meaning of the following Midrash (Vayikra Rabba 34:8):

Rav Yitzchak said that the Torah teaches us *derech erez* (proper behavior). When one performs a mitzvah he should perform it with joy. For had Reuven known that the Torah would record that he attempted to save Joseph from the brothers, he would have carried him on his shoulders and run home.

And if Aaron had known that the Torah would record that he greeted Moses with a happy heart after (Moses) was chosen to be the Redeemer, he would have come (to him) with drums and cymbals.

And had Boaz known that the Bible would record his giving Ruth some parched wheat to eat, he would have offered her a banquet.

When one does something to teach others, he does it in a more clear-cut fashion than if he were doing it for his own benefit alone. Had Reuven, Aaron and Boaz known that their actions were not just their own private concern, but would be recorded in the Torah as a lesson to posterity, they would have performed them with even greater intensity and zeal.

Derech erez is anything that promotes and strengthens society. Hence marital relations, business and commerce, and good character traits are all aspects of *derech erez*. Rav Yitzchak's lesson is that we should perform the mitzvah in such a way that our own joy in the mitzvah is obvious, for in that way we inspire and strengthen others in the performances of mitzvot.

The Midrash of Rav Yitzchak concludes that even today Elijah and Moshiach are still recording accounts of all our deeds to be included in future holy books. These works are sealed and affirmed by God Himself. From this we learn that our actions are not something between us and God alone, but must be done in such a way as to bring the respect and admiration of the surrounding society so as to promote the observance of Torah.



Focus in the Exile

Greetings from the holy city of Jerusalem!

This week's parsha, Masei, describes the journeys of the Jewish people during their 40 years in the desert. These wanderings from place to place are as a lesson about the transience and temporality of life in this world. According to the Degel Machaneh Ephraim (based on the Baal Shem Tov), the 42 places that the Jews encamped in the desert represent the 42 phases within each person's life.

This idea seems to follow the statement of the Nachmanides (Genesis 12:6, citing Tanchuma 9) that "the actions of the forefathers are repeated by their descendants." In other words, just as the Jewish people in the desert were transient wanderers, constantly moving from place to place, so, too, is our existence in this world temporary.

A hint to this idea is found in this week's parsha, yet in order to understand it, we must first go back to the beginning of Creation. The second verse of the Torah (Genesis 1:2) reads, "And the earth was EMPTINESS and VOID, and DARKNESS was on the face of the DEPTHS, and THE SPIRIT OF God hovered over the face of the waters."

The Midrash (Bereishis Raba 2:4, in the name of Reish Lakish) interprets this verse as a

prophecy about the future exiles of the Jewish people. EMPTINESS symbolizes the Babylonian exile; VOID refers to the Persian-Medean exile; DARKNESS represents the Syrian-Greek exile; and the DEPTHS refers to the current Roman exile. THE SPIRIT OF God alludes to the spirit of the Messiah, who will ultimately redeem the Jewish people from exile. (See the Midrash for numerous verses that support these correlations.)

This Midrash shows that God, in addition to creating the laws of nature, made the exiles of the Jewish people an integral part of Creation. This idea is very difficult to understand. Why would God decree the exiles before creating the world? At the outset of Creation, there weren't even any Jews! Why would God punish the Jewish people before they did anything wrong - and even before He created them? For although God knows from the beginning what the outcome will be in any given situation, He still relates to us on our own terms.

FOUR EXILES

We could suggest that the purpose of exile is not to punish us for misbehavior. Rather, the purpose of exile is to remind us that this world is a transient, temporary place. The many upheavals and expulsions throughout Jewish history have forcibly prevented us from ever feeling a sense of permanence.

According to the commentator Nachal Kadumim, this idea is hinted to in the first verse of Parshat Masei, **Eleh Masei B'nei Yisrael** - "These are the journeys of the Jewish people" (Numbers 33:1). The initials of these four Hebrew words stand for the four exiles that the Jewish people have experienced throughout the ages: **E**dom (Rome), **M**adai (Persia-Medea),

Bavel (Babylon), and **Y**avan (Syria-Greece). The exiles are hinted to in this parsha because they convey the same message as the 42 places that the Jews encamped in the desert. Both teach us about the transience and impermanence of the physical world.

Let's give some examples of this idea. Imagine taking an elevator to the top of the Empire State Building. Would it ever occur to you to vacuum the carpet or polish the mirrors in the elevator? You'd never bother, because you know you're going to get off any minute. This world is like an elevator (and we hope we're all going to get off at the top floor)! What is the use of getting overly involved in material pleasures? As our Sages say, "This world is like a lobby compared to the World to Come. Prepare yourself in the lobby so you will be able to enter the banquet hall!" (Avot 4:21)

A related story is told about a man who was traveling across Europe about a hundred years ago. When he reached Poland, he decided to visit the town of Radin, where the great sage the Chafetz Chaim lived. He took his luggage from the train station and went straight to the Chafetz Chaim's house, where he was graciously ushered in. Once inside, the traveler couldn't believe his eyes: the home of this great rabbi was practically bare! No pictures hung on the walls, and overturned milk crates sufficed for a table and chairs. Incredulous, the traveler asked him, "Where is your furniture?"

The Chafetz Chaim replied, "Where's yours?" The traveler was surprised by this strange question. "Me?" he asked. "I'm just passing through!" "So am I," responded the Chafetz Chaim. "I am also just passing through."

SHOPPING SPREE

One more example should make the point abundantly clear. Imagine that you've won the grand prize on a game show: a shopping spree at Macy's. For 15 minutes, you will have the entire store to yourself, during which time whatever merchandise you collect will be yours for the rest of your life. Try to picture what you would look like during those 15 minutes.

Now, imagine how you would react if, in the course of your frenzied shopping, a friend were to tap you on the shoulder and say, "I'd love to chat with you, just for two minutes. Can we go get a cup of coffee?" Most likely, you wouldn't even take the time to respond - or perhaps you'd just shout, "No time - I'll explain later," as you dashed off to the next department.

This imaginary shopping spree is comparable to our experience in this world. We each have an individual expiration date, but until that date arrives, we are in a candy store of Torah and mitzvot, and whatever we collect is ours for eternity. If we truly lived with this awareness, we would have to be *reminded* to eat, drink and sleep. Our physical considerations would pale in comparison to the importance of stashing away goods for eternity, and we would be constantly on the lookout for opportunities to accumulate more spiritual "merchandise." I have yet to hear anyone on their deathbed say, "If only I'd spent a few more hours at the office..."

May we be blessed, as we move from place to place on our journeys through life, to focus on what is truly important and not get distracted by fleeting temptations. In this merit, may God soon redeem us from our exile and afford us the opportunity to be involved in purposeful, meaningful, spiritual endeavors forever.



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