



A Taste of Torah Lead or Led

By Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

A certain hot-button issue that affected the Jewish community was being discussed by a number of individuals. It was pointed out that a particular Rabbi had taken a stance on the issue, one which wasn't necessarily the standard approach to such a dilemma. One of the people involved in the discussion, upon hearing this, responded, "Now that's a true adam gadol (great person)!" It was quite clear that this individual regarded this Rabbi as a great person simply because the Rabbi's position was the same as his.

In this week's parsha, we can see the error of such an approach. Moshe, realizing his end is near, asks Hashem to appoint a successor to lead the Jewish People, so that they will not be left as "sheep without a shepherd." One of the criteria Moshe includes in his request for a leader is one "who shall go out before them (to battle) and come in before them (following battle), who shall take them out and who shall bring them in." (27:17) It would appear that Moshe's request borders on redundancy; "going out before them" would seem to include taking them out as well, and "coming in before them" would mean bringing them back in. (see Rashi ibid. for another approach to this question.)

Rabbi Avrohom Shmuel Rabinowitz (1809-1869) points out that a horse

pulling a chariot and a commander of a regiment have a lot in common on the battlefield: they both go out ahead of the soldiers. There is a clear distinction between the two, though. While the commander is at the head because he is the one responsible for the decision-making during the battle, the horse is subject to the orders of the rider.

A leader is not the person who simply goes in front of the rest of the soldiers; he is the one who is calling the shots. If the leader's decision-making process is determined by the whims, desires, or opinions of those he is commissioned to direct, he is a leader no more. Thus, there are two distinct areas that Moshe requested Hashem provide. Firstly, that the new leader be someone who will courageously go in front of the soldiers in battle. Secondly, he must be someone who will guide the people based on what he feels is the right and proper thing to do, not because that is the popular opinion among the masses.

In our day, as well, our Torah leaders make decisions based on the Torah's perspective of what ought to be done. Whether or not we, as lay people, agree with their decision is irrelevant. The greatness of a Torah giant is inherent, and is not determined by the popularity of the positions he takes.

Ask the Rabbi Judge Knot

Jill Schlessinger wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Is there anything in the Torah (or in other Jewish writings) that addresses the issue of interpreting someone else's

feelings? For example: Something bad happens to someone and they are upset about it, and someone else tells them they are "over-reacting" and "irrational." What do Jewish writings say about making judgments about the legitimacy

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Stories For The Soul

Miracles Do Happen

My name is Mildred Hondorf, and I am a music teacher from Des Moines, Iowa.

Once, I had a student named Robby who told me that it had always been his mother's dream to hear him play. But as much as Robby tried, he lacked the sense of tone and basic rhythm needed to excel. Over the months he tried and tried while I listened and cringed and tried to encourage him. At the end of each weekly lesson he'd always say, "My mom's going to hear me play someday." But it seemed hopeless.

I only knew his mother from a distance as she dropped Robby off or waited in her aged car to pick him up. Then one day Robby stopped coming to our lessons. I assumed that because of his lack of ability he had decided to pursue something else.

Several weeks later I mailed a flyer about a recital to all my present and former students' homes. Robby called and asked if he could be in it, but I told him it was for current pupils. He said that his Mom had been sick and unable to take him to piano lessons but he was still practicing.

"Miss Hondorf... I've just got to play!" he insisted.

The night for the recital came. The high school gym was packed. I put Robby up last in the program because I thought I could always salvage his poor performance through my "curtain closer."

Well, the recital went off without a hitch. Then Robby came up on stage. His clothes were wrinkled and his hair looked like he'd run

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Interpersonal Issues

An Item Found a Long Time After it was Lost

If one found an item, even with identifying features, that appears to have been lost for a long time, e.g., it is quite rusty or mostly submerged in the ground, one may assume the owner is already aware of the loss, and has despaired of recovering it, and

the item may be kept. (One may need to ask a Halachic authority whether his particular circumstances fit this category.)

Adapted with permission from "The Halachos of Other People's Money" by Rabbi Pinchas Bodner (Feldheim Publishers)

Ask the Rabbi

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of other people's feelings?

Dear Jill Schlessinger,

In "Ethics of the Fathers," Hillel states, "Don't judge another until you reach his place;" meaning, until you have been in the exact same position. Therefore, you can almost never judge another's feelings.

Even if one feels sure that the other person is over-reacting, he should carefully consider if, how and when to express it. As Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar says, "Don't try to appease your friend at the moment of his anger, and don't try to comfort him when his dead lies before him." Trying to cheer someone

up at the wrong time, or to tell him he's over-reacting, can cause even more pain.

There are, however, "inappropriate" emotions. For example, the Talmud forbids "crying too much" - i.e., for too long a time - at the loss of a loved one. Eventually a person must get over his losses and move forward.

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter is reputed to have said: "When a child's toy breaks, he feels as bad as an adult would feel if his factory were destroyed." In short, people experience losses at different levels, so it's nearly impossible to judge others' feelings.

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Stories for the Soul

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egg-beater through it. I was surprised when he announced that he had chosen Mozart's Concerto #21 in C Major.

I was not prepared for what I heard next. His fingers danced nimbly on the ivories. He went from pianissimo to fortissimo...from allegro to virtuoso. After six-and-a-half minutes he ended in a grand crescendo and everyone was on their feet in wild applause.

Overcome, I ran up on stage and cried, "I've never heard you play like that Robby! How'd you do it?"

Through the microphone Robby explained: "Well, Miss Hondorf,

remember I told you my Mom was sick? Well, she had cancer and passed away this morning. And, well, she was born deaf so tonight was the first time she ever heard me play. I wanted to make it special."

In this week's Parsha, Bilam's donkey miraculously spoke to him. Just as Hashem gave the donkey this ability, we must believe that He can give us the ability to accomplish the seemingly impossible. All we have to do is put in the effort.

Adapted with permission from ShulWeek by Rabbi Boruch Lederman.

The Torah Weekly is made possible through a generous grant from the Harry H. Beren Foundation of Lakewood, NJ, in memory of Harry H. Beren, z"l.

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