

JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

Pinchas

In this week's Parsha we encounter a period of transition for the Jewish people. G-d asks Moshe to ascend a mountain to get a view of the land that he will not enter. Any hope that Moshe may have had that G-d would reverse His decree and allow Moshe free passage to the Land of our Forefathers is snuffed out. This realization seems to trigger a request from Moshe to G-d: "May Hashem, G-d of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the assembly, who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall take them out and bring them in; and let the assembly of Hashem not be like sheep that have no shepherd."

Simply put, Moshe as a leader is concerned with the welfare of his followers. Rashi (the foremost Medieval Biblical commentator) explains that Moshe was hoping that it would be his children who would continue in his path and walk before G-d as the leaders of the people. G-d makes it clear from the outset that He has other plans. It will not be Moshe's own children, but rather his disciple who will inherit the legacy of leadership for the Jewish people.

The wording that Moshe chose to describe G-d needs some investigation. G-d of the spirits of all flesh is not a common description that we find in the Bible. Again, Rashi sheds light on the intent and connotation implied in this phrase. What Moshe is saying to G-d is that everyone knows that G-d understands the spirit of all flesh (meaning all people) and knows that the spirit of each individual is distinct from all other individuals. Only G-d really appreciates just how different human beings can be. Moshe is pleading to G-d that He should have this in mind in choosing a leader. Please make sure that whomever You choose will be able to relate and identify with each and every other member of the Jewish community. For that is the gift that crowns a leader.



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G-d responds to Moshe saying, “Take Joshua, son of Nun, a man in whom there is spirit, and lean your hand upon him.” Again the word spirit (Ruach in Hebrew) appears in the text. The implication is that G-d acknowledges the concern of Moshe and has indeed chosen a leader who can relate to the needs of the spirits of the individuals. Moshe obeys the command and even goes beyond the original order. Instead of just laying one hand on Joshua, he places both of his hands upon him. This demonstrates that Moshe has a sincere desire to see Joshua succeed. Once it was clear that his successor was worthy of the task because he could relate and work with the entire people, Moshe was content to hand over the mantle of leadership.

A wise Rabbi in Jerusalem once taught me that there is a very simple definition of greatness. A child who has not yet reached the age of maturity is referred to as a ‘Katan’ which literally means small. The description is not reflect on the size of the person, but rather on how much room they have in their own heads for the minds of others. A child who has not yet matured is usually self-absorbed and cannot properly identify the needs of others. As one grows, the hope is that they can learn to empathize and be able to function with other people in mind. In essence, they have room for other people in their own minds. Certainly, one may keep their own opinions and make their own decisions, but one must be aware of how others will react and respond. The more people that one can hold in their head, the greater he or she is considered to be. In marriage, this is something that must be actualized early on in the relationship. A spouse has to be able to understand the needs and desires of the other in order to carry on a healthy relationship. That practice then spills over to include children, neighbors, colleagues, etc. Joshua was a leader with the potential to carry all of the minds of the people with him. He had the spirit that was necessary to make him great. Let’s hope that we all manage to find more space in our psyches for others.

Shabbat Shalom!

