

## Desert Trek – The Next Generation (of Leaders)

### Why Joshua?

Joshua had extensive early experience as military leader, as well as assistant to Moshe. He had his share of successes - the campaign against Amalek, and also failures - not only the spies' incident but also his misreading of the Golden Calf episode (Shemot 32:16, "There is a voice of war in the camp...."). But his standing up to the majority report of the spies, even if he could not convince them and the others to follow him to the Promised Land, showed principle and courage. These attributes, coupled with experience, made Joshua the logical choice.

Or was he? There were probably other candidates for the job. The Midrash suggests that Moshe entertained the idea that one of his sons should succeed him. Since the daughters of Tzelofhad were able to inherit of their father, why not also the sons of Moshe? Hazal point out that, unlike their father, they were not qualified in learning. However, there was probably another obvious candidate who had proved his mettle. Pinhas' patriotic act of zealotry stayed the physical, moral and spiritual plague that beset our people. To many Jewish loyalists, he was probably the hero of the hour. Even God conferred upon Pinhas, "*Briti Shalom* - my covenant of peace." So, why not Pinhas?

It is possible that letting Pinhas, Aaron's grandson and future heir to the priesthood, become the people's civil leader, would be too much mixing of religion and state. The Torah's vision of government does include religion and state, but they are not supposed to be identical. The King is not to be the High Priest and vice versa. This issue came back many years later to haunt our people, when the priestly Maccabees also became the civil leaders. So God, at the time of the Torah, chose as leader someone well qualified for the task but not from the Priestly tribe.

I personally believe that there were issues of personality and leadership abilities at play here. Pinhas' act may have been considered meritorious by God, but according to many midrashim, Hazal did not see it as a model to emulate. While his motive may have been pure, he was considered by the Sanhedrin and even by Moshe to have committed a criminal act. (See Talmud Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 15) The sages did not sanction what he did, and they were ready to try and sentence him. It was the only the "Divine Pardon" that got Pinhas off the hook. As one of my colleagues once suggested, (the late Rabbi Stanley Wagner of Denver in the Rabbinical Council of America Sermon Anthology of 1976,) "Pinhas received the Jewish Medal of Honor but did not enter the Jewish Hall of Fame." An act of pious zealotry, even for pure motives and subsequently endorsed by God, is not enough to qualify someone as a leader. And while Pinhas continued to serve our people in positive ways (he was one of the two spies Joshua sent after Moshe died; after the initial war of conquest for Israel, he led the delegation to negotiate with the two and a half tribes who settled in Transjordan [see Joshua 22]; and he served extensively as High Priest), he was not the right man for overall leader.

So, indeed, why Joshua? What qualities did Joshua have? A cursory look at God's dialogue with Moshe (Bamidbar 27:15-18) along with Rashi's comments yields a wonderful definition of leadership.

V. 15 "And Moses spoke to God saying."

One of my congregants from my shul in Long Israel once pointed out that this is one of the few cases where Moses speaks to God and not the other way around, the way the Torah notes hundreds of other times throughout. Ironically, Moshe speaks out on the eve of his retirement from leadership!

V. 16 "Let the Lord, God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man upon the congregation."  
Rashi: "Ribono Shel Olam! It is well known before you the mindset of each and every one, and they are not like each other. Pick for them a leader who can be patient with each and every

one according to their mindset." (Note that the same terminology is used when Moshe despairs and prays to God for guidance during the Korach rebellion. The issue there, according to the commentaries, is also that of Moshe not knowing how to deal with the diversity and conflicting demands of those he led.)

V. 17 "Who will go out with them and come in with them, who will lead them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of the Lord will not be like a flock without a shepherd." Rashi suggests a military theme here, both as analogy and also as reality, since the military campaign to conquer the Promised Land was imminent. "Not like the non-Jewish Kings who sit in their homes and send their soldiers to war, but rather as I (Moshe) fought with Sihon and Og... going out at the head and coming in at the head." This idea still applies today. The officers' motto of Tzahal, the Israel Defence Forces, is, "Aharaj!" - "After me," and the officers truly lead. That is why Israel has one of the highest officers' casualty rates among Western countries.

V. 18 "And God said to Moshe, take for yourself Joshua Bin Nun, a man in whom there is spirit, (*ruach*), and place your hand upon him. Rashi: "Just like you asked, someone who can walk according to the *ruach* of each one."

In other words, a leader has to have patience as well as courage. A leader has to be able to listen and be tolerant. A leader has to inspire and be ahead of the group, but not too far ahead that they lose sight of each other. And a leader has to have spirit. Joshua was the one with these qualities, thus he was the choice. *Halvai* all our leaders would aspire to this model of leadership! And may our new Shul officers have the courage and strength to do so!