Building Reflective Jewish Leaders Through the Use of Jewish Text

by

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Digest

As a Jewish professional, part of exercising leadership is cultivating other leaders. While there is no one single way in which to achieve this goal, I believe the place to start is with our texts and traditions – specifically with the Torah. Part of becoming an authentic Jewish leader is through finding one's voice in the text. And the Torah is full of leadership lessons one can use to grow as a person, as a Jew and as a Jewish leader.

The purpose of this thesis is to provide a practical tool for teaching models of leadership that are found in the first book of the Bible, Genesis. Chapter One examines what it means to be a Jewish leader and theories of leadership. Chapter Two is an exploration of how adults learn in informal settings and how learning fosters authentic leadership. The final chapter consists of the actual text studies from the Book of Genesis.

Dedication

One of the discoveries in my research was the powerful role that authenticity plays in influencing effective leaders and how they learn from significant life experiences. My friend, my teacher and my thesis advisor, Dr. David Weisberg, z"l, embodied authenticity and this thesis is dedicated to his memory. He was truly a friend to students and constantly sought to help make me successful. I truly miss our discussions and discoveries together as we spent hours in his office and around his dining room table.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank several members of my family who have played a key role in my finishing this thesis and rabbinical school as well as making the most of this significant life experience. I owe both of my parents an amazing debt that can never be repaid. My dad, the now "Senior" Rabbi Joseph, has truly been my inspiration to continue this path of learning and education. He has been an example to me of a great parent, a great leader and a great teacher and friend to students; I hope to be a rabbi like him someday. My mom, Dori, deserves a very special award as she has now helped put a husband and a daughter through rabbinical school. Her constant encouragement to me not to give up as well as her willingness (I know it was a hardship) to spend countless hours watching her grandson so I could work was invaluable. To dad and mom, I love you both more than you can ever know; thank you for helping me find my authentic voice.

To my son, Max, thank you for being amazing! I love watching you learn and grow as you discover your own authentic voice. I look forward to being a part of our next journey together.

The greatest debt I owe is to my truly amazing and wonderful husband, Gabe. When we decided to spent our life together, I am sure he never imagined what he was getting himself into. Gabe, thank you for your patience, your encouragement, your support and listening to me ramble on about my studies – thank you for moving around the world with me! You are amazing and I love you so very much.

Beyond my family I wish to say a special thank you to my adviser and friend, Dr. Richard Sarason, for all of his help and patience. Thank you for stepping in at the last minute to help me complete this project. I owe you a debt of gratitude!

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Introduction

I would like to open with the words of a Midrash found in b. Shabbat 88b:

אמר רב חנאל בר פפא מאי דכתיב "שמעו כי נגידים אדבר" (משלי ח/ו) למה נמשלו דברי תורה כנגיד
לומר לך מה נגיד זה יש בו להמית ולהחיות, אף דברי תורה יש בם להמית ולהחיות

> What is the meaning of that which is written in Proverbs (8:6), "Listen, for I (the Torah) will speak words of excellence, leadership, importance?"
>
> Why are the words of Torah compared to a distinguished individual, to a leader? This serves to tell us that just as this leader has the power to kill and give life, so too the words of Torah have the power to kill and give life.

היינו דאמר רבא, למיימנין בה סמא דחיי, למשמאילים בה סמא דמותא

> The Gemara explains: This is reflected by that which Rava said, "To those who grasp it with their right hand, the Torah is a drug of life – to those who grasp it with their left hand, it is a drug of death".

Rashi explains the term מיימינין :
עסוקים בכל כחם וטרודים לדעת סודה כאדם המשתמש ביד ימינו שהיא עיקר

> Those who endeavor with all their might to uncover the Torah's secrets are compared to someone who uses his right hand, the stronger hand.

This Midrash teaches us about the comparative strength and power of the leader and the words of Torah – both are life-granting forces. Rava and then Rashi further clarify and tell us that Torah is the source of life to those who learn it for its own sake and work very hard at understanding it fully. The words of Torah are compared to the leader. I would like to expound further and make a midrash on the midrash and add – not only is Torah compared to the leader, in its life-giving capacity, but, in essence it is the Torah, the pure and in-depth study of Torah, which produces the leader and cultivates Jewish leadership.

The overarching and guiding theory behind my vision of Jewish leadership is that it stems from study. Jewish leaders are nurtured and developed by the authentic learning

experience of studying in community. Only through study is one able to discover their authentic voice. This learning fosters personal growth and eventually empowers the dedicated and worthy students to have an impact on the family, the community and the face of Judaism today and in the future.

My thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter explores general concepts of leadership and Jewish leadership specifically. The second chapter examines the context in which learners will engage in the study of Torah and leadership, informal education. The final chapter consists of text studies from the Book of Genesis. Text from each *parasha* is highlighted as the focal point on the page and is surrounded by commentary from Jewish sources, questions for discussion and my own insight into the text through a *d'var torah.*

Chapter 1
Overview of General and Jewish Concepts of Leadership

General Concepts of Leadership

Leadership has been around for thousands of years, and yet we still are unable to contain it in a single definition we all agree on. Perhaps this is because leadership is continuously evolving and more than what it seems to be, depending on how you look at it. It is a complex concept, with many applications, and the results that it creates depend highly on the context in which it is being observed. The following discussion is based on the premise that leaders are made, not born. If you have the desire and willpower, you can become an effective leader. Good leaders develop through a never-ending process of self-study, education, training, and experience.

Leadership is a process by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs an organization in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent. Leaders carry out this process by articulating a strong vision for the future and applying their leadership attributes, such as beliefs, values, ethics, character, knowledge, and skills.[1]

To inspire others to higher levels of teamwork, there are certain things you must be, know, and, do. These do not come naturally, but are acquired through continual work

[1] Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice and Leadership* (Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, 2008), 345; Mike Bonem, James Furr and Jim Herrington, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey (* Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, 2000), 96; Erica Brown, *Inspired Jewish Leadership: Practical Approaches to Building Strong Communities* (Woodstock, Vt.: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2008), 31; John Kotter, *Leading Change,* (Boston, Harvard Business School Press, 1996), 25.

and study. Good leaders are continually working and studying to improve their leadership skills; they are not resting on their laurels.[2]

Although a position as a manager, supervisor, educator, etc. gives one the authority to accomplish certain tasks and objectives in the organization, this power does not make someone a leader, it simply makes them "the boss." Leadership differs in that it makes the followers want to achieve high goals, rather than simply bossing people around.[3]

B.M. Bass' theory of leadership states that there are three basic ways to explain how people become leaders. The first two explain the leadership development for a small number of people. Some personality traits may lead people naturally into leadership roles. This is the *Trait Theory*. A crisis or important event may cause a person to rise to the occasion, which brings out extraordinary leadership qualities in an ordinary person. This is the *Great Events Theory*. Finally, people can choose to become leaders. People can learn leadership skills. This is the *Transformational Leadership Theory*. It is the most widely accepted theory today and the premise on which this discussion is based.[4]

When a person is deciding if she/he respects you as a leader, that person does not think about your attributes; rather, that person observes what you do so that one can know who you really are. The person uses this observation to tell if you are an honorable and trusted leader or a self-serving person who misuses authority to look good and get promoted. Self-serving leaders are not as effective because their employees only obey

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[2] Bolman and Deal, 343.

[3] Bolman and Deal, 343.

[4] B. M. Bass, *Bass and Stogdill's Handbook on Leadership: Theory, Research and Managerial Application,* 3rd ed. (New York: Free Press, 1990), 167.

them, not follow them. They succeed in many areas because they present a good image to their seniors at the expense of their workers.

The basis of good leadership is honorable character and selfless service to your organization.[5] In your employees' eyes, your leadership is everything you do that affects the organization's objectives and their well-being. Respected leaders concentrate on what they are (such as their beliefs and character), what they know (such as job, tasks, and human nature), and what they do (such as implementing, motivating, and providing direction).[6]

What makes a person want to follow a leader? People want to be guided by those they respect and who have a clear sense of direction. To gain respect, they must be ethical. A sense of direction is achieved by conveying a strong vision of the future.

The Two Most Important Keys to Effective Leadership

According to a study by the Hay Group[7], a global management consultancy, there are 75 key components of employee satisfaction. They found that:

- Trust and confidence in top leadership was the single most reliable predictor of employee satisfaction in an organization.
- Effective communication by leadership in three critical areas was the key to winning organizational trust and confidence:

    1. Helping employees understand the company's overall business strategy.

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[5] Bass, 168.

[6] Bass, 170.

[7] Hay Group, *Reward Next Practices,* 2009, retrieved on July 28, 2011, http://www.haygroup.com/downloads/ww/reward_next_practices_report_august_2009.pdf

2. Helping employees understand how they contribute to achieving key business objectives.

3. Sharing information with employees on both how the company is doing and how an employee's own division is doing - relative to strategic business objectives.

This shows that a leader must be trustworthy and must be able to communicate a vision of where the organization needs to go. The next section, "Principles of Leadership," ties in closely with this key concept.

Principles of Leadership

Modeled after the U.S. Army's 1973 creed, the global training and consulting firm, Ramer Group, coined the following eleven principles of leadership to help you *be*, *know*, and *do*:[8]

- Know yourself and seek self-improvement - In order to know yourself, you have to understand your "be, know, and do," attributes. Seeking self-improvement means continually strengthening your attributes. This can be accomplished through self-study, formal classes, reflection, and interacting with others.
- Be technically proficient - As a leader, you must know your job and have a solid familiarity with your employees' tasks.
- Seek responsibility and take responsibility for your actions - Search for ways to guide your organization to new heights. And when things go wrong (they always do sooner or later); do not blame others. Analyze the situation, take corrective action, and move on to the next challenge.

[8] Ramer Group, *Concepts of Leadership,* 2005, retrieved on July 11 2011, www.ramergroup.com

- Make sound and timely decisions - Use good problem solving, decision-making, and planning tools.
- Set the example - Be a good role model for your employees. They must not only hear what they are expected to do, but also see. We must become the change we want to see (Mahatma Gandhi).
- Know your people and look out for their well-being - Know human nature and the importance of sincerely caring for your workers.
- Keep your workers informed - Know how to communicate with not only them, but also seniors and other key people.
- Develop a sense of responsibility in your workers - Help to develop good character traits that will help them carry out their professional responsibilities.
- Ensure that tasks are understood, supervised, and accomplished - Communication is the key to this responsibility.
- Train as a team - Although many so-called leaders call their organization, department, section, etc. a team; they are not really teams...they are just a group of people doing their jobs.
- Use the full capabilities of your organization - By developing a team spirit, you will be able to employ your organization, department, section, etc. to its fullest capabilities.

Factors of Leadership[9]

There are four major factors when examining concepts of leadership:

[9] The discussion of the four factors is also drawn from the Ramer Group analysis of leadership concepts.

Follower:

Different people require different styles of leadership. For example, a new hire requires more supervision than an experienced employee. A person who lacks motivation requires a different approach than one with a high degree of motivation. A leader must know their followers. The fundamental starting point is having a good understanding of human nature, such as needs, emotions, and motivation. In other words, as discussed above, you must come to know your employees' Be, Know, and Do attributes.

Leader:

You must have an honest understanding of who you are, what you know, and what you can do. Also, note that it is the followers, not the leader who determines if a leader is successful. If they do not trust or lack confidence in their leader, then they will be uninspired. To be successful you have to convince your followers, not yourself or your superiors, that you are worthy of being followed.

Communication:

You lead through two-way communication. Much of it is nonverbal. For instance, when you "set the example," that communicates to your people that you would not ask them to perform anything that you would not be willing to do. What and how you communicate either builds or harms the relationship between you and your followers.

Situation:

All are different. What you do in one situation will not always work in another. You must use your judgment to decide the best course of action and the leadership style needed for each situation. For example, you may need to confront an employee for

inappropriate behavior, but if the confrontation is too late or too early, too harsh or too weak, then the results may prove ineffective.

Various forces will affect these factors. Examples of forces are your relationship with your seniors, the skill of your people, the informal leaders within your organization, and how your organization is organized.

Attributes[10]

If you are a leader who can be trusted, then those around you will grow to respect you. To be such a leader, you must understand your *Be, Know, Do.*

- BE a professional. Examples: Be loyal to the organization, perform selfless service, and take personal responsibility.
- BE a professional who possesses good character traits. Examples: honesty, competence, candor, commitment, integrity, courage, straightforwardness, imagination.
- KNOW the four factors of leadership - follower, leader, communication, and situation.
- KNOW yourself. Examples: strengths and weakness of your character, knowledge, and skills.
- KNOW human nature. Examples: human needs, emotions, and how people respond to stress.
- KNOW your job. Examples: be proficient and be able to train others in their tasks.
- KNOW your organization. Examples: where to go for help, its climate and culture, who the unofficial leaders are.

[10] Ramer Group.

- DO provide direction. Examples: visioning, goal-setting, problem-solving, decision-making, planning.
- DO implement. Examples: communicating, coordinating, supervising, evaluating.
- DO motivate. Examples: develop morale in the organization, train, coach, counsel.

Environment

Every organization has a particular work environment, which dictates to a considerable degree how its leaders respond to problems and opportunities. This is brought about by its heritage of past leaders and its present leaders.[11]

Goals, Values, and Concepts

Leaders exert influence on the environment via three types of actions:[12]

- The goals and performance standards they establish.
- The values they establish for the organization.
- The business and people concepts they establish.

Successful organizations have leaders who set high standards and goals across the entire spectrum, such as strategies, plans, meetings and presentations, productivity, quality, and reliability. Values reflect the concern the organization has for its employees, customers, investors, vendors, and surrounding community. These values define the manner in which business will be conducted. Concepts define what products or services the organization will offer and the methods and processes for conducting business.[13]

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[11] Bolman and Deal, 27.

[12] Ibid, 369-370.

[13] Bass, 366.

These goals, values, and concepts make up the organization's "personality" or how the organization is observed by both outsiders and insiders. This personality defines the roles, relationships, rewards, and rites that take place.[14]

Roles and Relationships

Roles are the positions that are defined by a set of expectations about behavior of any job incumbent. Each role has a set of tasks and responsibilities that may or may not be spelled out. Roles have a powerful effect on behavior for several reasons, including the money being paid for performance of the role, the prestige attached to a role, and the sense of accomplishment or challenge.[15]

Relationships are determined by a role's tasks. While some tasks are performed alone, most are carried out in relationship with others. The tasks will determine who the role-holder is required to interact with, how often, and towards what end. Also, normally the greater the interaction, the greater the liking. This in turn leads to more frequent interaction. In human behavior, it's hard to like someone whom we have no contact with, and we tend to seek out those we like. People tend to do what they are rewarded for, and friendship is a powerful reward. Many tasks and behaviors that are associated with a role are brought about by these relationships. That is, new task and behaviors are expected of the present role-holder because a strong relationship was developed in the past, either by that role-holder or a prior role-holder.[16]

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[14] Bolman and Deal, 220.

[15] Bass, 60.

[16] Ibid, 60-61.

Culture and Climate

There are two distinct forces that dictate how to act within an organization: culture and climate. Each organization has its own distinctive culture. It is a combination of the founders, past leadership, current leadership, crises, events, history, and size. This results in rites: the routines, rituals, and the "way we do things." These rites impact individual behavior on what it takes to be in good standing (the norm) and directs the appropriate behavior for each circumstance.[17]

The climate is the feel of the organization, the individual and shared perceptions and attitudes of the organization's members.[18] While the culture is the deeply-rooted nature of the organization that is a result of long-held formal and informal systems, rules, traditions, and customs; climate is a short-term phenomenon created by the current leadership. Climate represents the beliefs about the "feel of the organization" by its members. This individual perception of the "feel of the organization" comes from what the people believe about the activities that occur in the organization. These activities influence both individual and team motivation and satisfaction[19], such as:

- How well does the leader clarify the priorities and goals of the organization?
- What is expected of us?
- What is the system of recognition, rewards, and punishments in the organization?
- How competent are the leaders?

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[17] Bolman and Deal, 269.

[18] Bass, 472.

[19] Ibid, 472.

- Are leaders free to make decisions?
- What will happen if I make a mistake?

Organizational climate is directly related to the leadership and management style of the leader, based on the values, attributes, skills, and actions, as well as the priorities of the leader. Compare this to "ethical climate" -- the "feel of the organization" about the activities that have ethical content or those aspects of the work environment that constitute ethical behavior. The ethical climate is the feel about whether we do things right; or the feel of whether we behave the way we ought to behave.[20] The behavior (character) of the leader is the most important factor that impacts the climate.[21]

On the other hand, culture is a long-term, complex phenomenon. Culture represents the shared expectations and self-image of the organization, the mature values that create "tradition" or the "way we do things here." Things are done differently in every organization. The collective vision and common folklore that define the institution are a reflection of culture. Individual leaders cannot easily create or change culture because culture is a part of the organization. Culture influences the characteristics of the climate by its effect on the actions and thought-processes of the leader. But, everything you do as a leader will affect the climate of the organization.[22]

Leadership Models

Leadership models help us to understand what makes leaders act the way they do. The ideal is not to lock in to a type of behavior discussed in the model, but to realize that

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[20] Bass, 473.

[21] Ibid, 471.

[22] Bolman and Deal, 269; Bass, 472.

every situation calls for a different approach or behavior to be taken.[23] Two models will be discussed, the Four Framework Approach and the Managerial Grid.

Four Framework Approach

In the Four Framework Approach, Bolman and Deal suggest that leaders display leadership behaviors in one of four types of frameworks: Structural, Human Resource, Political, or Symbolic.[24] The style can either be effective or ineffective, depending upon the chosen behavior in certain situations.

Structural Framework

In an effective leadership situation, the leader is a social architect whose leadership style is analysis and design. In an ineffective leadership situation, the leader is a petty tyrant whose leadership style is details. Structural Leaders focus on structure, strategy, environment, implementation, experimentation, and adaptation.[25]

Human Resource Framework

In an effective leadership situation, the leader is a catalyst and servant whose leadership style is support, advocacy, and empowerment. In an ineffective leadership situation, the leader is a pushover, whose leadership style is abdication and fraud. Human Resource Leaders believe in people and communicate that belief; they are visible and accessible; they empower, increase participation, support, share information, and move decision-making down into the organization.[26]

Political Framework

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[23] Bolman and Deal, 19.

[24] Bolman and Deal, 18.

[25] Ibid, 359-360.

[26] Ibid, 362-363.

In an effective leadership situation, the leader is an advocate, whose leadership style is coalition and building. In an ineffective leadership situation, the leader is a hustler, whose leadership style is manipulation. Political leaders clarify what they want and what they can get; they assess the distribution of power and interests; they build linkages to other stakeholders, use persuasion first, then use negotiation and coercion only if necessary.[27]

Symbolic Framework

In an effective leadership situation, the leader is a prophet, whose leadership style is inspiration. In an ineffective leadership situation, the leader is a fanatic or fool, whose leadership style is smoke and mirrors. Symbolic leaders view organizations as a stage or theater to play certain roles and give impressions; these leaders use symbols to capture attention; they try to frame experience by providing plausible interpretations of experiences; they discover and communicate a vision.[28]

This model suggests that leaders can be put into one of these four categories and there are times when one approach is appropriate and times when it would not be. Any one of these approaches alone would be inadequate, thus we should strive to be conscious of all four approaches, and not just rely on one or two. For example, during a major organization change, a structural leadership style may be more effective than a visionary leadership style; while during a period when strong growth is needed, the visionary approach may be better. We also need to understand ourselves as each of us tends to have

[27] Ibid, 364-366.

[28] Ibid, 367-372.

a preferred approach. We need to be conscious of this at all times and be aware of the limitations of our favoring just one approach.

Managerial Grid[29]

The Blake and Mouton Managerial Grid (1985) uses two axes:

1. "Concern for people" is plotted using the vertical axis
2. "Concern for task" is along the horizontal axis.

They both have a range of 0 to 9. The notion that just two dimensions can describe a managerial behavior has the attraction of simplicity. These two dimensions can be drawn as a graph or grid:

High *Country Club* *Team Leader*

9

P 8

E 7

O 6

P 5 *(Compromise Management)*

L 4

E 3

2

1

Low Impoverished *Authoritarian*

0 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Low High

[29] Ibid, 346.

TASK

Most people fall somewhere near the middle of the two axes. But, by going to the extremes, that is, people who score on the far end of the scales, we come up with four types of leaders:

1. Authoritarian Management (9 on task, 1 on people)

2. Team Leader/Integrative Management (9 on task, 9 on people)

3. Country Club/Indulgent Management (1 on task, 9 on people)

4. Impoverished/ Minimal Management (1 on task, 1 on people).[30]

Authoritarian Leader (high task, low relationship)[31]

People who get this rating are very much task-oriented and are hard on their workers (autocratic). There is little or no allowance for cooperation or collaboration. Heavily task-oriented people display these characteristics: they are very strong on schedules; they expect people to do what they are told without question or debate; when something goes wrong they tend to focus on who is to blame rather than concentrate on exactly what is wrong and how to prevent it; they are intolerant of what they see as dissent (it may just be someone's creativity), so it is difficult for their subordinates to contribute or develop.

[30] Ibid, 346.

[31] Ibid, 346.

Team Leader/Integrative Management (high task, high relationship)[32]

This type of person leads by positive example and endeavors to foster a team environment in which all team members can reach their highest potential, both as team members and as people. They encourage the team to reach team goals as effectively as possible, while also working tirelessly to strengthen the bonds among the various members. They normally form and lead some of the most productive teams.

Country Club Leader/Indulgent Management (low task, high relationship)[33]

This person uses predominantly reward power to maintain discipline and to encourage the team to accomplish its goals. Conversely, they are almost incapable of employing the more punitive coercive and legitimate powers. This inability results from fear that using such powers could jeopardize relationships with the other team members.

Impoverished Leader/Minimal Management (low task, low relationship)[34]

A leader who uses a "delegate and disappear" management style. Since they are not committed to either task accomplishment or maintenance, they essentially allow their team to do whatever it wishes and prefer to detach themselves from the team process by allowing the team to suffer from a series of power struggles.

The most desirable place for a leader to be along the two axes at most times would be a 9 on task and a 9 on people -- the Team Leader. However, do not entirely dismiss the other three. Certain situations might call for one of the other three to be used

[32] Ibid, 347.

[33] Ibid, 346.

[34] Ibid, 346.

at times. For example, by playing the Impoverished Leader, you allow your team to gain self-reliance. Be an Authoritarian Leader to instill a sense of discipline in an unmotivated worker. By carefully studying the situation and the forces affecting it, you will know at what points along the axes you need to be in order to achieve the desired result.

A Final Thought -- The Process of Great Leadership

According to Kouzes and Posner, the road to great leadership that is common to successful leaders does the following:

Challenge the process – First, find a process that you believe needs to be improved the most.

Inspire a shared vision – Next, share your vision in words that can be understood by your followers.

Enable others to act - Give them the tools and methods to solve the problem.

Model the way - When the process gets tough, get your hands dirty. A boss tells others what to do, a leader shows that it can be done.

Encourage the heart - Share the glory with your followers' hearts, while keeping the pains within your own.[35]

[35] J.M. Kouzes and B.Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge,* 4th ed. (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2007), 13-19.

Jewish Concepts of Leadership

Though laity of Jewish organizations are not always familiar with them, classical Jewish sources offer contemporary leaders a variety of sophisticated insights into effective leadership. Many of these premodern texts articulate perspectives that lie at the heart of today's widely accepted best practices.[36]

One of the ironies of American Jewish organizational life in the twenty-first century is the widespread tendency for Jewish groups to seek advice on leadership from well-regarded experts outside the Jewish community while remaining unaware of the profound insights on these matters found within classical Jewish tradition.[37]

In and of themselves these pursuits of best practices are not only beneficial but they also comport fully with the advice of the great medieval thinker and legalist, Moses Maimonides, who instructed his readers to "consider the truth regardless of the source" (*Shmoneh Perakim*). Such efforts are ironic, then, not because of their unabashed embrace of external wisdom. Thus, when lay and professional leaders of Jewish groups learn about leadership from prominent secular theorists, without knowing it, they frequently encounter approaches that have important analogues in premodern classical Jewish texts.[38]

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[36] Norman Cohen, *Moses and the Journey to Leadership* (Woodstock, Vt.: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2007), 1-5.

[37] Erica Brown, *Inspired Jewish Leadership: Practical Approaches to Building Strong Communities* (Woodstock, Vt.: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2008), 5.

[38] Hal Lewis, *From Sanctuary to Boardroom: A Jewish Approach to Leadership* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), introduction.

Great Jewish communities have always sought to blend the best of our own tradition with that of others. In the case of leadership, this begins with the recognition that Jewish sources do, indeed, address leadership efficacy, what it means to wield power, and the importance of nurturing leadership in others. Having emerged from a multiplicity of authors living over a great span of years, in a variety of venues, Jewish sources on leadership offer a great variety of perspectives. Although there is no single or definitive one-size-fits-all Jewish approach to leadership, it is possible to extract certain overarching themes on pivotal leadership issues from Judaism's classical sources.

Far from being antiquated vestiges of a bygone era, this material is often astoundingly current, providing important perspectives for leaders and their followers even in the twenty-first century. At a minimum then, it seems only reasonable that Jewish groups seeking a meaningful program of leadership training would be willing to consider the wisdom of their own traditions on leadership in concert with the latest theories emanating from the halls of American businesses and universities. Doing so will likely make clear that the leadership *Zeitgeist*, embraced so passionately by the American Jewish infrastructure, has roots that are deeply embedded in the soil of classical Judaism.[39]

Another reason why otherwise knowledgeable Jews are often skeptical about the idea that there are authentic Jewish insights on leadership—on power, authority, decision-making, and related matters—is that the sources constituting Judaism's perspectives on these issues are not amassed in a single centralized collection. There is no book of the Torah or tractate of the Talmud wholly devoted to leadership. Instead, this

[39] Brown, introduction.

material must be extrapolated by plumbing the depths of diverse texts drawn from across millennia.

I will highlight four examples, among many, of Jewish perspectives on effective leadership that are likely to have particular resonance for congregational leaders.

Shares and Circumscribes Power

Reflecting a model first articulated in the Torah itself, Jews throughout history have built systems of communal leadership that sought to divide power, rather than allow it to coalesce in a single individual or group. Painfully aware of the scourges of autocracy, many classical Jewish sources suggest that the most effectively run enterprises are those in which power is shared among a diversity of interests—spiritual, political, and educational. Such an approach guarantees that a multiplicity of perspectives are brought to the table of communal discourse and prevents the rise of unilateral leaders whose claims on the truth forestall the rise of an engaged followership.

There are numerous examples of power-sharing to be found in premodern classical texts. The Torah, for example, relates its importance in the career of Moses when it details the counsel he received from his father-in-law, Jethro, to appoint judges to share responsibility with him (see Exodus 18:14–23). Later on, the biblical text stipulates that for King Solomon to assume power properly, he had to have the support of both the priest and the prophet (see I Kings 1:38–39).

Throughout medieval Europe, Jewish communal rulings often insisted that a ban (*herem*) could only be issued with the joint support of rabbis and wealthy communal trustees. Finally, though not a classical text per se, the tripartite arrangement that characterizes today's religious movements (seminary, professional trade associations for

clergy, and umbrella organizations for congregational leaders) is one of several modern examples of the functionally equivalent dynamic.[40]

Further, Jewish authorities have long recognized that for all of its difficulties, power is alluring and enticing. "It is easy to go up to a dais, difficult to come down," taught the sages (*Yalkut, Va'etchanan*, 845). The tendency to abuse power is endemic in leadership situations, not because the leaders in question are inherently evil or corrupt, but because the trappings of power are easily misappropriated and exploited, for example, we can look to the story of David and Bathsheba as described in I Kings 11–12. Rather than condemn strong leadership all together, however, or advocate a political theory akin to anarchy, seminal Jewish sources acknowledged this reality and went to great lengths to design systems in which a leader's individual powers are circumscribed (see, for example, the constraints on monarchy in Deuteronomy 17:15–20).

In such a model, overall responsibility assumes the form of a matrix in which power is shared, rather than a pyramid in which a single individual exercises absolute authority. Such an approach to power has its weaknesses. Clarity, unanimity, and the ability to mobilize rapidly are often the first casualties. American Jewish organizational infighting and immobility during the Holocaust represent a sad example.[41] Nonetheless, Jewish communities over time have preferred the disorganization of shared and limited power to the so-called efficiencies of dictatorial regimes.[42]

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[40] Lewis, 57

[41] Steven Bayme, *Understanding Jewish History* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House 1997), 391–393.

[42] Hal Lewis, *Models and Meanings in the History of Jewish Leadership* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press 2004), 63.

Veterans of Jewish organizations will recognize the manifold real world applications of a system in which a leader must share power with others who make similar claims. Today's Jewish communities, mirroring their historical antecedents, are consistently marked by internecine tensions between fundraisers and educators, clergy and philanthropists, community relations advocates and academics. In Federations and JCCs, professionals and volunteers struggle to navigate the tempestuous waters of their own working relationships, as do congregational rabbis and their boards of trustees.[43] Recognizing that shared power is not only a vital component of the historical Jewish experience but also a mark of successful leadership is an important first step in responding to these challenges.

The understanding that truly effective leadership must be limited reverberates not only in organized Jewish life but in politics and business as well. In our own day, the success of "boundary-less" and flattened corporate organizational models suggests that Judaism's insistence on shared and limited power has application well beyond the ancient world. In today's most effectively run enterprises, teamwork is nurtured, information transfer is enhanced, and networking is expanded because of a systemic commitment to shared leadership. So too, systems of shared power incubate creativity across a variety of institutional silos and create invested stake holders and constituents.[44]

In systems in which power-sharing is not a defining feature, the potential for unbridled abuse predominates. Tempting as it may be to embrace a view of leadership in

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[43] Ibid, 75.

[44] Cathy Greenberg-Walt & Alaistair Robertson, "The Evolving Role of Executive Leadership," in Warren Bennis, Gretchen M. Spreitzer, & Thomas G. Cummings (eds.), *The Future of Leadership* (San Francisco: JosseyBass, 2001), 139–157.

which a single individual, granted sweeping powers, is called on to "save" or "fix" an organization, a dominant trend in Judaism has always rejected that approach.[45] Individuals aspiring to greatness as Jewish leaders must look carefully at personal leadership styles and the structural design of their organizations to ensure a system of shared and circumscribed power.[46]

Rebuke and Team Building

A key lesson in effective team building may be derived from an otherwise obscure commandment in the Bible, known as rebuke or *tokhahah* in Hebrew. To be sure, many are troubled by the injunction to "reprove your neighbor," found in Leviticus 19:17:"You shall not hate your kinsfolk in your heart. Reprove your neighbor, but incur no guilt because of him."[47]

To moderns, the idea of chastising another's behavior seems incongruous with the prevailing principle of "minding your own business." How inappropriate it seems to meddle in the affairs of another. Certainly, in a business setting individuals are normally reticent to challenge the behavior of those whom they do not supervise, and in an organizational context, most people are unaccustomed to holding others responsible for their actions as volunteer committee members or trustees.[48]

In point of fact, however, when considered in light of classical commentaries and contemporary research, this commandment may have a great deal to teach today's Jewish

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[45] Lewis 2004, 75.

[46] Steven Kerr, "Boundaryless," in Bennis, Spreitzer, Cummings (eds.), *The Future of Leadership*, 59–66.

[47] Plaut, Gunther. *The Torah: A Modern Commentary,* (New York: Union for Reform Judaism Press, 2005).

[48] Lewis 2006, 87.

leaders about building better teams. It is also likely that this precept has much of value to contribute to a discussion of effective supervision. Although it is clear that, on its face, the Torah is not talking about teamwork in an organizational context, rabbinic authorities throughout the ages have interpreted this verse to mean that all members of a society are duty-bound to share responsibility for the errant behavior of its members.[49]

To Maimonides, the desired outcome of *tokhahah* is the improvement and regeneration of the individual offender and, by extension, those with whom he or she interacts.[50] Other classical authorities point out that the injunction to rebuke follows the verse, "You shall not hate your kinsfolk." Thus, not correcting a colleague is tantamount to despising him or her.[51] Some commentaries even go so far as to argue that failure to correct the behavior of an associate is, in effect, to personally commit and thus repeat the same egregious error.[52] In this context, then, admonition and chastisement are the logical extensions of communal accountability.

Such accountability is fundamental to the creation of productive and effective teamwork, which is a central function of all successful leaders.[53] Consider the convergence between the Torah's instructions and the research of Patrick Lencioni. "In the context of teamwork," he notes, accountability "refers specifically to the willingness of team members to call their peers on performance or behaviors that might hurt the team." "Members of great teams improve their relationships," he argues, "by holding one

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[49] Lewis 2006, 111.

[50] *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot De'ot 6:6–7

[51] Lewis 2006, 112.

[52] Moses Nahmanides on Leviticus 19:17

[53] Patrick Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 212-213.

another accountable, thus demonstrating that they respect each other and have high expectations for one another's performance."[54]

Simply stated, Lencioni's findings corroborate ancient Jewish wisdom. The willingness of members to hold each other accountable as individuals and as part of a collective, no matter how difficult or unpleasant, is the key factor in constructing teams that work. Doing so ensures that substandard performers are pressured to improve and that all team members are held to the same superior expectations.

Here again, the application of a sacred Jewish principle in a contemporary organizational context leads to the possibility of vastly improved performance and long term institutional success. Despite the repeated use of familial metaphors ("Here at Temple XYZ, we're really one big family"), frequent references to a lay-professional "partnership," and the illusion of functioning as "a well-oiled team," the realities of Jewish organizational life (and business in general) are often quite different. It is not enough to simply invoke the well-trod concept of accountability as discussed in the general literature.[55] The biblical command to reproach one's neighbor presupposes a commitment to mutual interdependence that goes well beyond platitudinous expressions of one-for-all-and-all-for-one. In the Torah's view (a view that has been substantiated by contemporary research findings on teams),[56] effective teamwork is not about minimizing differences in search of a false sense of harmony.

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[54] Lencioni, 213.

[55] Lencioni, 213-215.

[56] Chanan Tigay, January 30, 2005, *As Jewish groups' needs evolve, professionals seek new training*, retrieved August 2, 2011 from http://www.jta.org

Boards of trustees that ignore divergent values and perspectives within their ranks because exploring and confronting them are too uncomfortable are not really serving their constituents.[57] Allowing the pursuit of consensus to impede bold decision-making out of fear of alienating a major contributor is not effective leadership. Tolerating professional incompetence or inappropriate behavior from lay leaders because of a dearth of viable alternatives perpetuates dysfunction throughout the enterprise.[58]

In its teaching about *tokhahah* then, the Torah provides today's Jewish leaders with an invaluable lesson. Before any progress can be made toward the construction of a sophisticated organizational team, the leader must establish the overarching principle that all members are expected to hold themselves and each other mutually accountable.[59] This means a willingness to challenge, even admonish, the errant behavior of team members as the ultimate sign of respect and confidence.[60]

Leadership Development, Succession Planning and Transitioning

Recent surveys reveal that in nearly 60% of nonprofit corporations neither the boards nor the upper echelon of professionals have discussed executive transition plans during the past 24 months. This is despite the fact that as many as 40% of current nonprofit CEOs report actually planning to leave their posts within the next two years.[61] American Jewish groups are certainly no strangers to this reality. For all the business

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[57] Ibid

[58] Lencioni, 213-215.

[59] Ram Charan, *Know-How: The Eight Skills that Separate People Who Perform From Those Who Don't* (New York: Crown Business, 2006), 23.

[60] Charan, 23-24.

[61] David E. Edell, May 22, 2006, *Unprepared for CEO Transitions: Where Will We Find the Next Generation of Nonprofit Executives?* retrieved on August 2, 2011, from http://drgnyc.com

savvy and insight purported to exist on Jewish boards, there is little empirical evidence to suggest that congregations with long-serving rabbis, Federations and Centers with veteran executives, or educational institutions with tenured senior administrators give the issue of succession serious consideration.[62]

Waiting for a retirement announcement before thinking about next steps or failing to create a pipeline of new leaders to meet the future needs of the organization is antithetical to effective leadership. The situation is often more acute in the lay-leadership realm in which short terms, regular rotation of officers and trustees, and considerable turnover among committee chairs only underscore the urgency of articulating a comprehensive and systematic approach to leadership transition.[63] Deferring decisions until the eleventh hour and parachuting new individuals into office without serious preparation irreparably compromise an organization's long-term efficacy.

Related to these issues is the widely acknowledged lack of mentoring and coaching available for many aspiring lay and professional leaders in the organized Jewish community.[64] A research project conducted for the Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies in Chicago on the state of Jewish leadership education interviewed more than 30 volunteer and professional heads of major American Jewish enterprises.[65] Overwhelmingly,

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[62] Steven Windmueller, "The Survival and Success of Jewish Institutions: Assessing Organizational and Management Patterns," Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, Jerusalem Newsletter/Viewpoints, No. 350, January 15, 1997.

[63] Windmueller 1997.

[64] Shifra Bronznick, August 23, 2000, *Advancing Women in the Communal World*, retrieved August 18, 2011, from http://www.advancingwomen.org. Rebecca Spence, November 10, 2006, *Nonprofits Mull Staff Shortages*, retrieved August 19, 2011, from http://www.forward.com.

[65] Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies, "A Jewish View on Leadership," Chicago: Spertus Center for Jewish Leadership, July 17, 2006.

respondents pointed to a "real lack" of mentors for both younger professionals and up-and-coming lay leaders. Although some progress is being made in select corners of the organized Jewish community, many lay and professional leaders are routinely elevated to positions of importance without appropriate training and absent the ongoing opportunity for mentoring and coaching.[66]

That any of this should be true in Jewish organizations is particularly troublesome in light of the overarching legacy of Moses, believed by many to be the quintessential Jewish leader. In relating pivotal instances in his life and career, the biblical narrative describes Moses' unswerving commitment to empowering the leadership of others for the long-term good of the people.[67] In his reaction to the aspiring, albeit unsanctioned, leadership of Eldad and Medad (Numbers 11:24–29), or his insistence (even on what was surely the worst day of his life, having just been denied entrance to the Promised Land) that the people needed a new leader to carry on the mission (Numbers 27:15–17), or the unconditional way in which he embraced Joshua as his successor (Numbers 27:22–23 and Rashi's commentary), Moses knew that no leader's job is complete unless and until succession plans are fully formulated and underway. Notwithstanding his unparalleled status, Moses (renowned in Jewish sources for his personal humility; see Numbers 12:3) understood that no leader can create a cult of personality and hope to succeed in the long term. Despite being the elect of God, he recognized that the most important job of a leader is cultivating leadership in others.[68]

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[66] Ibid.

[67] Cohen, 165-166.

[68] Ibid, 171.

In view of Moses' uncontested status as the prototypical Jewish leader, those who care deeply about the state of Jewish leadership would do well to study and apply his example to their own leadership work. Difficult as it may be for some in today's Jewish world to envision life beyond themselves, as effective leaders that is precisely what they must do. So too, organizational nominating committees must take the long view by planning for more than just the next term. Committees require vice-chairs as well as chairs, and it is not enough to think about who the next president will be six months before the Annual Meeting. And, it must be said: lay people serving on boards of trustees abrogate the great leadership tradition of Moses and are derelict in their duties if they fail to contemplate and address the issue of executive and rabbinic succession long before a crisis has been reached.[69]

The notion that a leader is, above all else, responsible for the identification and nurturing of the next generation of leadership has been corroborated consistently by contemporary research and best practices. Ram Charan, for example, points out that truly great leaders aggressively search for people with leadership potential and then create regular opportunities that allow them to grow within the enterprise.[70] Today, the most effective leaders in the most successful companies and organizations invest heavily in the identification, training, and preparation of those who will succeed them.[71] In these enterprises, leadership has become a system-wide capability, not an individual

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[69] Lewis 2006, 80.

[70] Ram Charan, *Know-How: The Eight Skills That Separate People Who Perform From Those Who Don't,* (New York: Crown Business, 2006), iii.

[71] David Giber, Louis Carter, & Marshall Goldmith, eds, *Best Practices in Leadership Development Handbook* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), vii.

personality trait.[72] As the examples from the life of Moses suggest, leadership training and development require a substantial personal commitment on the part of the incumbent leader and can only be accomplished over a protracted period of time.[73]

Authenticity

Part of becoming an authentic Jewish leader is through finding one's voice. "Those who take on positions of leadership in the Jewish community know that like Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, they will have to make order out of potential chaos, forge a path for others to follow through unmarked terrain, and sustain a vision of the future in the face of skepticism.[74] Howard Gardner, the author of *Leading Minds* suggests: "The ultimate impact of the leader depends most significantly on the particular story that he or she relates or embodies...Leaders tell stories about themselves and their groups, about where they are coming from and where they are headed, about what is feared, struggled against, and dreamed about...The most basic story has to do with issues of identity. And so it is the leader who succeeds in conveying a new version of a given group's story who is likely to be most effective."[75]

We must challenge ourselves to think about the practice of leadership as the capacity to keep asking the basic questions about ourselves. This is about "hearing your

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[72] James O'Toole, "When Leadership is an Organizational Trait," in Bennis, Spreitzer, Cummings, *The Future of Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 158–174.

[73] Lewis 2007, 38; Brown 2008, 102; Cohen 2007, 25.

[74] Brown, 5.

[75] Howard Gardner, *Leading Minds: An Anatomy of Leadership* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 14.

voice"; a theme so powerfully, yet personally captured by the poet Mary Oliver in her creative work, "The Journey:"[76]

One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice—
though the whole house
began to tremble
and you felt the old tug
at your ankles.
"Mend my life!"
each voice cried.
But you didn't stop.
You knew what you had to do,
though the wind pried
with its stiff fingers
at the very foundations,
though their melancholy
was terrible.
It was already late
enough, and a wild night,
and the road full of fallen
branches and stones.
But little by little,
as you left their voices behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice
which you slowly
recognized as your own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world,
determined to do
the only thing you could do—
determined to save
the only life you could save.

[76] Mary Oliver, *Dream Work* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986), 38.

Here she speaks of one's ability to unpack what she describes as the "new message" which in the end you uncover as your own distinctive, yet at times, hidden voice.

And you will want to be focused in the pursuit of your mission, shaped and nurtured by your vision. This is about remembering why you do what you do. Ultimately, this commitment to vision will serve to both sustain and to define you.

This will require you not only to frame your leadership around these contemporary principles of best practice but also setting a commitment for yourself to reach back into the richness of the Jewish past, unwrapping the historical insights of our tradition that serve in part as a roadmap to your own thinking and conduct.

As Stephen Covey urges: "Find your voice and inspire other to find theirs..."[77]

Conclusion

In a free and open society, no congregation or communal organization is under any obligation to embrace Judaism's classical wisdom on leadership, however insightful. All are free to pursue their quest of theories on how to lead successfully from a variety of sources. As I have laid out above, many of what are widely recognized as effective leadership's first principles derive from Judaism's foundational texts. In an era in which so many are turning to Jewish sources for perspective on a panoply of personal spiritual issues, those who seek to don the mantle of Jewish leader should do no less. In Chapter Three, we will have an opportunity to explore these foundational texts to glean leadership lessons and interactively explore what has been previously discussed through text study on the Book of Genesis. In the next chapter, we will explore the connection between

[77] Stephen Covey, *The 8th Habit: From Effectiveness to Greatness,* (New York: Free Press, 2004), introduction.

education and leadership since learning and leadership are intricately connected. Jewish leaders are nurtured and developed by authentic learning experiences of study. Creating a culture of leadership and learning is the ultimate act of leadership development.

Chapter Two
Jewish Education

This chapter is an exploration of the existing education paradigms in which a congregant would learn about leadership and how to approach teaching text to adults because fostering Jewish leadership stems from study. Through study, one is able to discover their authentic voice. This learning fosters personal growth and empowerment. Leadership development is a learning process.

How do people learn? Recently, traditional notions about where and how people learn have been re-examined, and new settings and modes are emerging as contexts for education. Today people are learning everywhere – in bookstores, cyberspace, at summer camps, retreats, and theme parks; and the term "edu-tainment"[78] has even been coined to refer to entertainment that educates. The new settings join the traditional venues of education – elementary schools, secondary schools, and universities – as vibrant partners in the process of education, and sometimes they even challenge traditional hegemonies.[79] Many of these new modes of education have been collectively denoted "informal education." Informal education in our day is a world-wide growth industry. An extensive literature describes youth movements, synagogues, community centers, adult learning, and other vehicles for informal education across the globe, in Eastern Europe, Africa, England, and Latin America, as well as in the United States and Canada.[80] Once regarded as "supplementary" or "extra-curricular," this kind of education is assuming an expanding new centrality in contemporary life.

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[78] Clifford Stoll, *High Tech Heretic* (New York: Doubleday 1999), 11.

[79] Stoll, 12-22.

[80] Retrieved from *The Encyclopedia of Informal Education,* www.infed.org on August 10, 2011.

Informal education has been a factor in Jewish life for many decades. The network of camps, youth movements, and community centers is sizable.[81] In recent years informal Jewish education has seen impressive developments encompassing research, university courses, articles, training programs, increased funding, and heightened lay interest, in addition to a plethora of practical programs.[82] The Jewish world is showing great interest in the possibilities offered by informal education. We may well be in an era of the emergence of informal education as a seminal force in Jewish life.

Informal Jewish education is usually juxtaposed with formal Jewish education. This is actually a fairly recent development in the history of education; the linguistic distinction did not exist in former times in either Jewish or general culture. Jewish education has a long and glorious history dating back to biblical and talmudic times. Throughout the ages, the Jewish community has devoted much energy to the establishment and maintenance of a rich educational network.[83] There is little doubt of the link between a strong commitment to education and perpetuation of Jewish literacy, lifestyle, and peoplehood. However, schools were not the only contexts in which Jewish education took place. With a host of other settings exemplifying Jewishness, formal schooling was always accompanied by a powerful parallel (or "informal") system. It included the neighborhood, the home, communal agencies, and the synagogue; celebrations and holidays, group experiences, mentors, and the daily and yearly

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[81] Bernard Reisman, *Informal Jewish Education in the United States: Report for the Mandel Commission,* New York: Mandel Foundation, 1991; Retrieved from www.brandeis.edu/ije on August 2, 2011. (This online document contains no page numbers.)

[82] Retrieved from www.brandeis.edu/ije on August 2, 2011.

[83] David Gordis, "Towards a Rabbinic Philosophy of Education," in Haim Dimitrovsky, ed, *Exploring the Talmud,* (New York: Ktav, 1976), 52-55.

calendar.[84] There was synergy and consistency between a diverse collection of agencies, all of which educated from a shared perspective.

The term "informal education" entered the educational lexicon as a result of the bifurcation of education in modern societies. These societies created distinct state-run institutions called "schools" with a particular focus on: (1) intellectual learning; (2) progression on a hierarchical educational ladder; (3) transmission of cognitive knowledge from adult to child; and (4) addressing the socio-economic needs of societies.[85] These public schools became associated with "curriculum," "teachers," and "grades," and all other aspects of education were increasingly regarded as "extra-curricular," "supplementary" or "informal" education.[86]

Much of twentieth-century Jewish education was shaped by general education, and repeated this mistaken dichotomy of "formal" versus "informal," ultimately treating them as separate and distinct domains. These two worlds developed independently throughout the century, did not always communicate well with each other, and often operated with mutual misunderstanding and suspicion.[87]

The history of Jewish life throughout the ages, as well as the contemporary Jewish experience, convincingly suggests that informal Jewish education is a serious and legitimate partner in the larger Jewish educational enterprise and that it has the potential to be a powerful complement to Jewish schooling in enriching personal Jewish lifestyle

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[84] Gordis, 73-74.

[85] Joel Spring, *A Primer on Libertarian Education* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1975), 12.

[86] Spring, 14.

[87] Gordis, 77.

and deepening collective Jewish identity. In the following, we will explore the meaning and promise of informal Jewish education for enhancing Jewish leadership.

Defining informal education

What is informal education? The most common answer is that informal education is education outside of schools.[88] In order to be able to really understand informal education and use it effectively, we need to understand precisely what it is and how it works. Descriptions of informal educational programs abound, but efforts to confront informal Jewish education on an abstract and conceptual level are rare.

I will attempt to define and analyze the concept. By looking at some prominent contemporary examples of informal Jewish education, eight generic characteristics have been identified that define informal Jewish education as an individual-centered and highly interactive educational approach focused on learning through experience, with knowledgeable and committed educators who use group process and a "curriculum" of Jewish ideas and values to create a holistic educational culture.[89] Some of the eight characteristics are common to both general and Jewish informal education. The value-based curriculum and the complexity of the educator's role, however, are unique to the latter.

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[88] Barry Chazan, "The Philosophy of Informal Jewish Education" *The Encyclopedia of Informal Education*, 2003, www.infed.org, retrieved on August 10, 2011. (This online document contains no page numbers.)

[89] Chazan

[Adult learning refers to voluntary frameworks established to enable adult Jews to enrich their Jewish knowledge and acquire Jewish skills in warm and non-threatening settings.][90]

The 8 Best Practices of informal Jewish education

1. Person-centered Jewish education. The central focus of informal education is the individual and his/her growth. Underlying this focus is the belief that human beings are not simply empty vessels waiting to be filled, as John Locke's "impression model" of teaching would suggest,[91] but rather, the individual is an active dynamic organism who grows and is shaped through his/her own active engagement in learning. Hence, this kind of education places primacy on the person's own involvement and progress. He/she is considered an active partner in the educational dynamic. Educationally, this implies what is often called "a child-centered pedagogy" in the context of young learners, with a focus on personal interests, listening as much as telling, starting with questions, identifying interests, and collaborating rather than coercing.[92] In terms of informal Jewish education, the person-centered principle means helping each individual grow and find meaning as a Jew. The emphasis is on personal Jewish development rather than the transmission of Jewish culture, and the individual is actively engaged in his/her own journey of Jewish growth.[93]

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[90] Chazen

[91] Israel Scheffler, "Philosophical Models of Teaching," in *Harvard Education Review* 35 (1965), 63.

[92] Alfie Kohn, *The Schools Our Children Deserve,* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1997), 12.

[93] Chazen

The preoccupation with the person in informal Jewish education also implies concern with affecting the learner's *total* being. While selected activities may focus on a specific Jewish skill or Jewish topic (such as learning to speak Hebrew or build a *sukkah*), the ultimate aim of informal Jewish education is building the person's overall Jewish character. Thus, informal Jewish education does not see "Jewish growth" as exclusively intellectual but rather as a synthesis of aesthetic, affective, moral, behavioral, and cognitive dimensions.[94]

2. The centrality of experience. Informal Jewish education is rooted in a belief that the experience is central to the individual's Jewish development. The notion of experience in education derives from the idea that participating in an event or a moment through the senses and the body enables one to understand a concept, fact or belief in a direct and unmediated way. Experience in education refers to learning that happens through participation in events or through other direct action, or by direct observation or hearing. John Dewey expanded upon this idea by suggesting that people are active centers of impulse rather than passive vessels and they learn best when they are actively rather than passively engaged in experiencing an idea or an event. Such experiencing is rooted in the interaction of the idea or event with the person's life and with a continuum of ideas that enables the experience to contribute to ongoing personal growth.[95] The focus on experience results in a pedagogy that attempts to create settings which enable values to be experienced personally and events to be experienced in real time and in genuine venues,

[94] Chazen

[95] J. Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1937), 18.

rather than their being described to the learner. Over the years this notion of experiencing has become closely identified with "experiential education," often seen as the "calling card" of informal education.[96]

In terms of informal Jewish education, learning occurs through enabling people to undergo key Jewish experiences and values. For example, an experiential approach to Shabbat focuses on enabling people to experience Shabbat in real time – buying flowers Friday afternoon, lighting candles at sunset, hearing *kiddush* before the meal, and eating *challah*. This approach does not deny the value of learning *about* Shabbat in classes and from texts but it does suggest that cognitive learning about an experience cannot replace the real thing.

It is important to note that the experience of study, the learning of ideas, if done well, is in itself an experience and one that can be very powerful. The unmediated confrontation with text, either individually or via *havruta* or a class with an exceptional teacher, are powerful examples of the central Jewish value of *talmud* torah. Thus, the emphasis on experience is not a rejection of the experience of study; rather, it is a refocusing on the active engagement of a person with all his/her senses so that the learning comes from within rather than being imposed from without.[97]

Jewish education lends itself particularly well to the experiential approach because so many of the concepts that we wish to teach are rooted in actual experiences.

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[96] Reisman

[97] Reisman

3. A curriculum of Jewish experiences and values. Curriculum has been generally seen as characteristic of formal rather than informal education and understood in terms of set courses of studies, with lists of subjects to be covered, books to be read, ideas to be learned, and tests to be given. However, the more generic concept of curriculum as an overall blueprint or plan of action is very much part of informal Jewish education. While it is both flexible and closely related to the lives and significant moments of the learners, this curriculum is rooted in a well-defined body of Jewish experiences and values.[98]

In contemporary Jewish life there is a diversity of views regarding the core experiences and values of Jewish tradition or culture. Religious approaches are likely to emphasize prayer, study, holidays, and rituals. Ethnic approaches are likely to emphasize Hebrew, holidays, music, and customs. National approaches are likely to emphasize the Land of Israel, travel to Israel, Hebrew, and Jewish history. Because of this diversity, it is difficult to arrive at one agreed-upon core curriculum for teaching experiences and values.[99] However, there are some Jewish experiences that seem to be shared by the majority of informal Jewish educational systems: (1) Jewish holiday and calendar experiences; (2) Jewish lifecycle experiences; (3) studying Jewish texts; (4) Jewish cultural and peoplehood experiences; and (5) acting upon Jewish values.[100]

A central dimension of informal Jewish education's curriculum is its flexibility and dynamism. The methods of teaching "core contents" and the sequence in which they are taught are open to change and adjustment. These core experiences and values may be

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[98] Chazen

[99] Chazen

[100] Reisman

"taught" in a variety of ways, depending upon time, place, and the individual pace of each learner.[101]

4. An interactive process. Ultimately the unfolding of the curriculum is determined by the interaction of people with each other and with core experiences. Informal Jewish education is rooted in the belief that the active interchange between students and between students and educators is a critical dimension of Jewish learning. Interaction refers to a reciprocal effect or influence between two or more people. The behavior of one, it is assumed, acts as a stimulus for the behavior of the other. People learn and grow through active social interaction, which stimulates ideas, causes us to think and rethink views, and helps us to re-conceptualize our beliefs and ideologies. The active dialogue back and forth with others is not simply pedagogically useful; it is, in a more basic sense, a pivotal factor in shaping our ideas, beliefs, and behaviors.[102] The principle of interactivity implies a pedagogy of asking questions, stimulating discussions, and engaging the learner. To stimulate interactivity, educators must create an environment which invites learners to listen to each other and to react with dignity and decency.[103] The pedagogy of informal Jewish education is rooted in techniques that enfranchise openness, encourage engagement, instigate creative dialectic, and insure comfort of diversity and disagreement. For example, students may be asked what they think; how great rabbis of

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[101] Chazen

[102] Martin Buber, "Teaching and the Deed," in *Israel and the World* (New York: Schocken, 1948); Lawrence Kohlberg, *The Philosophy of Moral Development* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), 125.

[103] Kohlberg, 125-132.

the past might have reacted; what the Jewish contents means for their lives; and what they agree or disagree with.

Informal Jewish education is as concerned with igniting the dialogic with the learner as it is with transmitting the culture. Informal Jewish educators cannot really complete their work unless there is a dynamic interactive process between student and educator, student and student, student and text, and student and Tradition. Neither ingenuous nor instrumental, this interaction is an inherent element of informal Jewish education's theory of learning.[104]

5. The group experience. In informal education, the group is an integral component of the learning experience. As Emile Durkheim and G.H. Mead argued, groups are *a priori* forces that shape human life,[105] rather than technical structures that are superimposed upon us. The groups of which we are part shape our minds, language, and selves in very central ways. Therefore, teaching groups is not simply about transmitting knowledge to all the individuals gathered in one room, but rather is very much about the dynamic role of the collective in expressing and reinforcing values that are part of the culture of the society that created the group. Groups are not simply aggregates of people learning individually in parallel fashion; they are social networks that teach ideas and values through the essence of the group process. Thus, the adult Jewish learning class is not simply a classroom of individuals expanding their Jewish knowledge; it is a dynamic community of like-minded adults sharing knowledge, experiences, pain, joys, and

[104] Chazen

[105] Emile Durkheim, *Education and Sociology* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1957); G. H. Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934).

common moments.[106] The skilled informal adult Jewish educator does not just teach Jewish history or holidays; he/she also shapes a community that exemplifies the Jewish value of *kehilla.* The group is central in informal Jewish education in that the key values of *klal yisrael* (the totality of Israel), *am yisrael* (Jewish people), *kehillat kodesh* (holy community), *and tikkun olam* (improving the world) are experienced through its very existence.[107]

Some have seen Jewish associationalism as a limited or even problematic kind of Judaism and Jewish education.[108] Reservations about an identity that is exclusively tribal or associational are understandable, but there is also great power to a positive collective communal Jewish consciousness, as evidenced by Jewish involvement in the movement for Soviet Jewry and the Civil Rights movement in the United States, as well as Jewish support for Israel over the years.[109] Informal Jewish education attempts to harness that power.

6. The "culture" of Jewish education. Informal Jewish education is rooted in the belief that education is ultimately about "creating culture" rather than transmitting knowledge.[110] This form of education attains its goals most effectively by treating the entire educational setting as a comprehensive culture. "Culture" here refers to the totality

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[106] Chazen

[107] Chazen

[108] Steven M. Cohen and Arnold Eisen, *The Jew Within* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

[109] Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).

[110] Jerome Bruner, *The Culture of Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), x; Michael Cole, *Cultural Psychology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), v.

of components that make up educational contexts: architecture, styles of dress, codes and norms of behavior, seating patterns, physical and aesthetic decor, norms of human interaction, language patterns, and many others.[111] According to the theory of cultural psychology, it is the total cultural milieu that teaches, by presenting, creating, and reinforcing values, ideas, experiences, norms, and ultimately a worldview.[112] Hence, informal Jewish education emphasizes the importance of orchestrating settings to reflect and model the values and behaviors deemed important.

Informal Jewish education focuses on all aspects of an environment in order to educate for Jewishness. It does not emphasize only cognitive or discursive content, but also the many diverse aspects of the setting as a whole: what the room looks like; what food is served and how; how staff members interact with each other. With such an approach, logistical and organizational considerations are neither incidental nor secondary to the educational program; they are themselves inherently educational issues.[113]

The notion of an "educational culture" also implies that education is not limited to specific locales such as classrooms or school buildings; it can occur anywhere. As we learn in the most concise and most powerful text on informal Jewish education ever written, Jewish education takes place "when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Deuteronomy 6: 4–9).

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[111] Bruner, x-xi; Cole, v-vii.

[112] Cole, vii.

[113] Bruner, 1.

The notion of a culture of education also suggests that no one agency has a monopoly on Jewish education. Such a culture can be created wherever Jews are found: in community centers, Jewish family service offices, and sports clubs; at retreats and conferences; during meals and bus rides. Some of these places may well be ideal venues for Jewish education because they are real settings where Jewish experiences can be lived out. The task of the educator is to shape all settings so that they may serve the larger educational vision.[114]

7. An education that engages. Informal Jewish education intensely engages and even co-opts participants and makes them feel positive about being involved.[115] Because of its focus on the individual and on issues that are real to him/her, informal Jewish education is often described as "fun," "joyful," or "enjoyable." This should not be taken as a sign of frivolity or lack of seriousness. As Erikson and others have taught, identity is in part a sense of positive feelings about a group or a frame of reference; and positive feelings about a Jewish experience play an important role in the development of Jewish identity. Indeed, there are those who say that we need such experiences because Jewish identity development is so often complicated by a plethora of negative associations. Research on informal Jewish education points to the high degree of participant satisfaction as compared with other spheres of Jewish life.[116]

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[114] Bruner, 150.

[115] Chazan, *Jewish Identity and Education in Melbourne*; Len Saxe et al., *A Mega-Experiment in Jewish Education: The Impact of Birthright Israel* (Waltham, Mass.: The Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University, 2002), ix-xi.

[116] Chazen 2002, ix-xi.

In this context, informal Jewish education may be compared to play and sports.[117] The literature on play and sports emphasizes the involvement and engagement of the learner; the joy in the moment; the immediacy of it all; the positive memory, and the warm associations.

8. Informal Jewish education's holistic educator. The informal Jewish educator is a total educational personality who educates by words, deeds, and by shaping a culture of Jewish values and experiences.[118] He/she is a person-centered educator whose focus is on learners and whose goal is their personal growth. The informal Jewish educator is a shaper of Jewish experiences. His/her role in this context is to create opportunities for those experiences and to facilitate the learner's entry into the moments. The informal Jewish educator promotes interaction and interchange. One of his/her major tasks is to create an environment that enables this interactivity to flourish. This requires proficiency in the skills of asking questions, listening, and activating the engagement of others.[119]

The informal Jewish educator is a creator of community and *kehilla:* he/she shapes the aggregate into a group and utilizes the group setting to teach such core Jewish values as *klal Yisrael* (Jewish peoplehood), *kvod ha'adam (*the dignity of all people), *goral meshutaf* (shared destiny), and *shivyon* (equality).[120] Informal Jewish educators are creators of culture; they are sensitive to all the elements specific to the educational setting so that these will reflect values and experiences they wish to convey. The task in this

[117] Saralea Chazan, *Profiles of Play* (London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2002), 8.

[118] Chazen, 2011

[119] Chazen, 2011

[120] Chazen 2002, 5.

instance is to make every decision – big or little – an educational decision. Informal Jewish educators must be able to engage those with whom they work and make their learning experience enjoyable. The stimulation of positive associations is part of the informal Jewish educator's work. Finally, the informal Jewish educator needs to be an educated and committed Jew. This educator must be knowledgeable since one of the values he/she comes to teach is *talmud torah* – Jewish knowledge. He/she must be committed to these values since teaching commitment to the Jewish people, to Jewish life, and Jewish values is at the heart of the enterprise. Commitment can only be learned if one sees examples of it up close.[121]

Informal Jewish education defined. Having identified these eight characteristics, we can spell out a definition of informal Jewish education:

> *Informal Jewish education is aimed at the personal growth of Jews of all ages. It happens through the individual's actively experiencing a diversity of Jewish moments and values that are regarded as worthwhile. It works by creating venues, by developing a total educational culture, and by co-opting the social context. It is based on a curriculum of Jewish values and experiences that is presented in a dynamic and flexible manner. As an activity, it does not call for any one venue but may happen in a variety of settings. It evokes pleasurable feelings and memories. It requires Jewishly literate educators with a "teaching" style that is highly interactive and*

[121] Chazen 2002, 5.

participatory, who are willing to make maximal use of self and personal lifestyle in their educational work.[122]

Ultimately, informal Jewish education is a philosophy of Jewish education. It is a theory or philosophy about educating people that emphasizes choice, high degrees of interactivity, a flexible conception of content or subject matter, accessible "teachers," and much group process. Informal Jewish education implies not a place but a worldview about how people learn, what is important to learn, and how we should teach. To begin to really talk about informal Jewish education is to confront the big and basic questions of education.

One important source for understanding informal Jewish education is the history and texts of Jewish tradition. The great texts of our civilization, along with the social history of Jewish life throughout the ages and across continents, reveal much about basic educational approaches and practices in Jewish communal and religious life. Important resources include: biblical and talmudic texts, the history of Jewish education and community in Eretz Israel and in Babylonia, the academies of the great rabbis, Jewish camping and youth movements in the twentieth century, and the thinking of such diverse personalities as Rabbi Akiva, Martin Buber and Rabbi David Saperstein.

Informal Jewish education, as an approach that maintains that people learn by being actively involved, is a good fit with the diversity, mobility, and longevity that characterize the twenty-first century Jewish world. With its emphasis on experience and values, informal Jewish education seems uniquely equipped to help people on that most

[122] Chazen, 2011

important of human endeavors—the search for personal meaning. The twenty-first century warmly welcomes an education that reaches out to each of us as unique human beings and helps us grapple with the search for answers to life's big questions. The days of informal education being "supplementary" or "extra-curricular" are over. Informal Jewish education has assumed a major educational role in twenty-first-century Jewish life. In the next chapter, we will explore this search for personal meaning through text study. These text studies are designed to be used in informal adult educational settings and draw upon the themes and best practices discussed in this chapter.

Chapter Three
Genesis: An Exploration of Leadership and Self Through Text Study

Part of becoming an authentic Jewish leader is through finding one's voice in the text. "Those who take on positions of leadership in the Jewish community know that like Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, they will have to make order out of potential chaos, forge a path for others to follow through unmarked terrain, and sustain a vision of the future in the face of skepticism. ...Today's leaders have new challenges, but the base ingredients for good leadership seem universal; they rarely change over time, context, or location. Ancient Jewish models of leadership, when read carefully, remain relevant to modern challenges."[123] The Torah is full of leadership lessons one can use to grow as a person, as a Jew and as a Jewish leader and this happens through education and study.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a practical tool for the exploration of self and self as leader through the lens of Genesis. Following will be an exploration of each *parashah*, in order, highlighting a central leadership theme from the text and building a commentary around that specific Torah text. The commentary draws upon our rich canon of rabbinic literature as well as modern thinkers. Each *parasha* also contains my own *d'var torah* and guiding questions for study.

There are many ways in which one would be able to use this guide in an informal adult learning setting. If time permits, I would suggest reading through the material as a full group, giving participants the opportunity to share reflections as you go. In the questions section, people can pair off as *chevruta* partners to share reactions and gather

[123] Erica Brown, *Inspired Jewish Leadership: Practical Approaches to Building Strong Communities* (Woodstock, Vt.: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2008), 5.

back as a whole group to compare responses. The *d'var torah* section may be used as a *nechemta* to conclude the session with a charge for people to ponder.

If there is limited time, one way to look at the material is through the lens of PaRDeS, an acronym formed from the first letters of the four levels meaning 'orchard' in Hebrew. (The English word Paradise is derived from the same Persian root).

Pshat: (lit. *simple*) Pshat comes from the root which means simple, although Pshat is sometimes anything but simple! Pshat correctly means the intended meaning (the opposite of Drash; see below). The problem is, one person's pshat is another person's drash!

Remez: (lit. *clue*) Remez in modern Hebrew means hint. Traditionally, remez referred to methods such as gematria (word-number values) and it refers to the alluded meaning (reading between the lines).

Drash: (lit. *to examine*) Drash is the drawn out meaning; homiletical or interpretative meaning. The word 'midrash' is from the same root. The drash is an interpretation that is not explicit in the text, in other words, not pshat.

Sod: (lit. secret). Sod is to teach about mystical or esoteric meaning and the realm of the Divine.

Perhaps there is only time for the *pshat*, for reading the text and exploring the commentary or perhaps there is only time for the *drash and sod,* for reading or delivering the *d'var torah* at the end. Why not only use *pshat*? In a way, *pshat* is what the biblical scholar is trying to do: determine what the TEXT really meant. *Drash* allows us to find new meaning and new ideas, answering the question, not what did the text mean but what does the text say to ME. My prayer is that there is enough time to explore each section of the *parashah* guide to really find the ME.

Breishit (Genesis 1:1-6:8)

Overview:

In the first parasha, the cosmos is created in 7 days, ending with the culmination of creation, the weekly Sabbath. Adam and Eve are placed in the Garden, but are expelled after eating the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Cain and Abel fight and Cain kills his brother, thus setting up the pattern of human violence and jealousy that the rest of the characters in the Torah must struggle with.

וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה, וְהִנֵּה-טוֹב מְאֹד ; וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר, יוֹם הַשִּׁשִּׁי

"God then surveyed all that [God] had made, and look - it was very good! And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day." (Genesis 1:31)

creation was at that point "hung up and standing," and really only finished many, many years later, on the "sixth day" which would define forever after the ideal relationship between humans and the Divine. What "sixth day" was this? The sixth day of the Hebrew month of Sivan, upon which the Jews accepted the Torah, and which is still celebrated as the holiday of Shavuot, the anniversary of the giving and receiving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

Commentary:

The medieval commentator Rashi (R. Shlomo Yitzhaki, France, lived late eleventh century) finds something grammatically unusual in this verse, and as he likes to do, uses it as the basis for a beautiful religious teaching. In all the other verses in this chapter telling us what got created on which day, it simply says: "a second day", "a third day, and so on. In this verse, the day is named differently: "THE sixth day," instead of "a sixth day." One interpretation Rashi offers, based on an earlier book of Biblical interpretation, is that the "the" connected to "sixth day" tells us that the work of

R. Tanchuma began his discourse with the verse "He has made everything beautiful in its time" (Ecclesiastes 3:11), a verse that implies that the world was created in its proper time, and before that it was not deemed right for the world to be created. As R. Abbahu said: from this verse it may be deduced that the Holy One kept creating worlds and destroying them, creating worlds and destroying them, until He created these [heaven and earth]. Then He said: Those did not please Me, but these do please Me. –Bialik and Ravnitzky, *The Book of Legends*, Schocken Books, 1992, p. 6.

R. Hama Bar Hanina told the parable of a king who built a palace. When he looked at it, it pleased him, and he said: O palace, palace, may you find favor in my eyes at all times just as you find favor in my eyes at this moment, So, too, the Holy One said to His world: My world, My world, may you find favor in My eyes at all times just as you find favor in My eyes at this moment. – Bialik and Ravnitzky, The Book

All Hebrew translations are from:Tamara Eskenazi and Andrea Weiss, *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*, New York: URJ Press and Women for Reform Judaism, 2008.

of Legends, Schocken Books, 1992, p.6.

Questions:

1. What is your holy purpose?
2. What does it mean to be involved in the work of creation?
3. Even God took time in creation; how do we, as leaders, pace our work?

D'var Torah

I think Rashi is not only concerned with explaining an odd extra Hebrew letter (the "hay" which means "the"), but more importantly, reminding us that merely existing physically isn't really the whole point of our lives – from the very beginning, we were put on this earth for spiritual ends as well. The idea that God's work of creation wasn't "complete" until Torah was given and accepted can be a metaphor for our lives: having the most wonderful life in the physical world (work, food, housing, sex, money, you name it) won't be complete unless spiritual goals – Torah – are accepted as our guiding principles.

Rashi seems to be less concerned with the mechanics of the physical aspects of the creation story and more concerned that we understand that our cosmos has more than only a physical dimension to it. What's true for the world as a whole is true for each individual: one becomes complete not when one's body finishes growing up but when one takes on a holy purpose in life. This parasha is only "Breishit," the beginning – the rest of the Torah remains to help us learn what that is, and what we are truly capable of as leaders in the Jewish community.

Noach (Genesis 6:9-11:32)

Overview:
Creation is not off to such a good start: the earth is filled with violence and corruption, and so God decides to flood the earth and start over, choosing Noach to build an ark to save himself and his family and at least one pair of every kind of animal. After the flood, God establishes the rainbow covenant with every living creature. Humans decide to challenge God by building the Tower of Babel, so they become dispersed, and the portion ends by introducing us to Avram and Sarai, who will later on become Abraham and Sarah, the First Family of the Jewish nation.

אֵלֶּה, תּוֹלְדֹת נֹחַ--נֹחַ אִישׁ
צַדִּיק תָּמִים הָיָה, בְּדֹרֹתָיו:
אֶת-הָאֱלֹהִים, הִתְהַלֶּךְ-נֹחַ.

"This is Noah's chronicle. Noah was a righteous man; in his generation, he was above reproach; Noah walked with God."
(Genesis 6:9)

Commentary:
"In his generation"
Some of our Sages expound this to his praise: all the more so had he lived in a generation of righteous people, he would have been even more righteous. And there are those who expound it to his defamation: by the standard of his generation he was righteous, but had he lived in the generation of Abraham he would have been considered as nothing.
-Rashi on Genesis 6:9.

"For you have I seen righteous before me..."
Now we know our sages denigrated Noah because when God told him that God was going to bring the flood, Noah did nothing, unlike Abraham with the people of Sodom. That was his sin. As a result, from that time on he was no longer perfect. He was only righteous when his good deeds were weighed against his bad deeds. -Hatam Sofer, Moses Schreiber, 1762-1839, leading European Orthodox rabbi, known by the name of his most famous book.

"These are the generations of Noah...and Noah walked with God"
Why are Jews not considered to be descendents of Noah but rather of Abraham...? The explanation is that even though Noah was righteous and perfect in his actions, he was not the ideal of the righteous Jew. "Noah walked with God," not with people, not with others – he was not interested in humanity, in the environment. His righteousness was directed inward, to himself and his family...He was commanded by God to build an ark – he built it board by board and nail by nail, for a hundred and twenty consecutive years, and it never crossed his mind that there might be a way to avert God's decree and to save the world from destruction.

Abraham was different...Abraham taught the world proper behavior and knowledge of God. When God wished to overturn Sodom, Abraham did all in his power to save those wicked people.

Noach (Genesis 6:9-11:32)

-Moses Alshekh, 1498-1593, scholar and rabbi in Turkey, Greece and Israel.

QUESTIONS:
1. NOAH IS THE FIRST PERSON THE TORAH DESCRIBES AS A "TZADIK" (RIGHTEOUS). WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM NOAH ABOUT WHAT MAKES SOMEONE RIGHTEOUS?
2. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A TZADIK?
3. WHAT CHARACTERISTICS OF LEADERSHIP ARE EXEMPLIFIED BY NOAH? BY ABRAHAM?
4. WHAT LESSONS CAN BE LEARNED FROM THE COMMENTATORS ABOUT THE IDEAL LEADER?

D'var Torah:
The tikkun of humanity is a gradual process that takes place over many generations. Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden represent the most perfect example of humanity. However, after their expulsion from Paradise, humanity had to begin the process of regaining perfection. This effort would be long and hard, marked with digressions and "descents."

Before the giving of Torah on Sinai, there were basically two moral options available to people. One could either strive to behave the best they could within the context of the norms of their generation, identified as "walking with God." Alternatively, one could strive for a moral perfection that transcends the norms of the age into which they were born. Noah, who is the most righteous of his age, walked with God, while Abraham, who is identified as universally "righteous," walked before God.

After the giving of Torah at Sinai, a new level of Tikkun is added to the list. At Sinai, with the giving of mitzvot, a new moral standard was set, one that was explicit. Unlike Abraham, who strove for a moral perfection that had no precedent, or Noah, who could not rise up above the prevailing immorality that surrounded him, we strive to follow a path that has clearly been laid out for us. This is walking after God. Our task is simply the struggle to behave correctly. God has set the path before us. We must simply follow along.

Being a leader is more than walking after God but one who also walks with people. Noah is contrasted with Abraham who questions God on the destruction of Sodom because it demonstrates Abraham's ability to mitigate a relationship between God and people. This teaches us that a leader must have concern for his/her community and future generations, not just ones immediate self and person. One must not only be *involved* but engaged with the world around you.

Lech L'chah (12:1–17:27)

Overview:
The first two *parshiot* of Genesis tell the story of the creation of the world; with this, the third portion, the story shifts to the beginnings of the Jewish people. Abraham and Sarah leave their home in Ur Kasdim to head out for the land of Canaan; they arrive there only to leave for Egypt and return to Canaan again. Abraham's nephew Lot is with him at first, but settles in Sodom, which will later be destroyed for its evil ways; Lot also has to be rescued by Abraham in a bit of military action. God makes a covenant with Abraham to give him land and descendents, and changes his name. Finally, (now) Abraham has a son with Hagar, the Egyptian maidservant; this causes family tensions.

וְאֶעֶשְׂךָ, לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל,
וַאֲבָרֶכְךָ, וַאֲגַדְּלָה שְׁמֶךָ ;
וֶהְיֵה, בְּרָכָה

I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and it shall be a blessing. (Genesis 12:2)

The promise/demand of God is, "I will make of you a great nation," which the Tanchuma translates, "I shall create you anew." In this reading, the call of lech l'cha is an urging to self-transformation: at base, that is the meaning of a change of name or a change of place. -Aviwah Gottlieb Zornberg, The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis, Image Books, Doubleday, New York, 1995

Commentary:
"And you shall be a blessing." You will be the blessing by whom people will be blessed, saying, "God make thee like Abraham." - Nachmanides on Genesis 12:2

The life of men with whom new histories begin can seldom or never be a sheer unclouded blessing; not this it is which their consciousness of self whispers in their ears. "And thou shalt be a destiny": Such is the purer and more precise meaning of the promise.... -Thomas Mann, quoted in *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, edited by Gunther W. Plaut, UAHC Press, New York, 1981, p. 95

QUESTIONS:

1. According to the Ramban, what does "being a blessing" mean? If a person "is a blessing," does he or she necessarily bring comfort or joy to those around him or her?
2. Do you think Zornberg would say that Abraham is created or re-created in this Torah portion?
3. The *Tanchuma's* translation/interpretation is intriguing in that it equates becoming great with being created anew. How do we

Lech L'chah (12:1–17:27)

HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO RE-CREATE OURSELVES AND BECOME BLESSINGS EVEN WITHOUT CHANGING OUR NAME OR PLACE? IS THIS TYPE OF TRANSFORMATION ESSENTIAL TO BE A GOOD LEADER?

4. WHY DOES MANN CHARACTERIZE THE "LIFE OF MEN WITH WHOM NEW HISTORIES BEGIN" AS NEVER BEING A "SHEER UNCLOUDED BLESSING"?

D'var Torah:

The Jews are a people familiar with blessings. In the Talmud, Rabbi Meir instructs us to say at least one hundred blessings each day. On Shabbat evening, it is traditional for parents to offer blessings to their children. To a daughter, a parent prefaces the Priestly Benediction with the traditional liturgical formula "May God make you like Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah." And what is the parallel blessing for a son? Is it to be like Abraham, our forefather? Oddly, boys are not encouraged to be like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: "May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh" is our prayer for our sons.

Perhaps the tradition invoking the names of Joseph's children, Ephraim and Manasseh, arose in order to remind us of the reunion between Joseph and Jacob and Jacob's blessing of his grandsons (Genesis 48). But what about Abraham? Doesn't Nachmanides tell us that we should aspire to be blessed in Abraham's name? Isn't Abraham himself considered to be "a blessing"? But the people whose lives were touched directly by Abraham may not have felt so blessed. Sarah struggled during her life with Abraham. Hagar (who midrash tells us was formerly an Egyptian princess) was shunned by her mistress and exiled to the wilderness, then mistreated upon her uncelebrated return. Isaac was almost sacrificed by his own father. So was Abraham really such a blessing to those around him in his own generation?

Perhaps the blessings Abraham brings are his gifts to future generations. Abraham's legacy is evident in the promise of his descendants Ephraim and Manasseh, two boys he never met. Their existence ensures the continuation of the covenant between Abraham and his God and the prayer that "all the families of the earth/Shall bless themselves by you" (Genesis 12:3).

When we bless our own children, we recall the merit of our ancestors. But by asking God to make our children like Ephraim and Manasseh, we express the hope that our children will be allowed to grow into their own blessings. We realize that being a blessing involves raising the mundane fact of our

Lech L'chah (12:1–17:27)

biological existence into something more sacred and meaningful. Like Abraham, we, too, must take a journey from the accident of who and where we are to who we wish to become. We can become blessings through the work we do, our relationships with others, and our connection with the Divine: *Vehyeih b'rachah*, "And you shall be a blessing" (Genesis 12:2).

Vayeira (Genesis 18:1-22:24)

חָלִלָה לְךָ מֵעֲשֹׂת כַּדָּבָר הַזֶּה,
לְהָמִית צַדִּיק עִם-רָשָׁע, וְהָיָה
כַּצַּדִּיק, כָּרָשָׁע; חָלִלָה לָךְ--
הַשֹּׁפֵט כָּל-הָאָרֶץ, לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה
מִשְׁפָּט

Far be it from You to do such a thing, killing innocent and wicked alike, so that the innocent and the wicked suffer the same fate. Far be it from You! Must not the Judge of all the earth do justly? (Genesis 18:25)

Overview: Continuing the story of Abraham and Sarah, the portion opens with Abraham sitting in his tent, recovering from his circumcision when he notices three "men" approaching. The men, who are actually messengers from God, accept Abraham's offer of hospitality and then announce to Abraham and Sarah that Sarah will bear a child in her old age. Sarah (as would most 90 year old women) responds to this news by laughing. Afterwards, Abraham accompanies the three visitors as they proceeded on their journey. Two of the divine messengers make their way toward Sodom, while God makes known to Abraham the plan to destroy the sinful city. Abraham debates with God, earnestly interceding on behalf of the doomed city. But after protracted haggling, when not even ten righteous people are found in Sodom, God proceeds with the city's destruction. Abraham's nephew Lot, who tried to protect the messengers from the Sodomites' abuse, escapes the destruction with his two daughters. Later, hidden in a cave, thinking that they are the only ones left in the world, Lot's daughters ply him with drink and sleep with him, hoping to repopulate the world. Abraham and Sarah travel to Gerar and Sarah enters the house of the king there. Sarah does have a son, Isaac, and she expels Hagar and Ishmael when she thinks they threaten Isaac, but God saves them and makes them a promise that Ishmael too will be a great nation. Finally, Abraham hears the call from God to take Yitzhak and offer him as a sacrifice; at the last minute, Abraham's hand is stopped by an angel, and a ram is offered instead.

Commentary:

[Robert Alter points out that the term Abraham uses for God, "Judge of all the Earth" echoes the reference to justice in what he describes as "God's interior monologue" that prefaces the actual discussion between the two.] *The Judge of all the earth.* The term for "judge," *shofet*, is derived from the same root as *mishpat*, "justice," which equally occurs in God's interior monologue about the ethical legacy of the seed of Abraham. -Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses* [New York: Norton, 2004], p. 89

Vayeira (Genesis 18:1-22:24)

Why does Abraham stop at 10? Perhaps it takes a critical mass to generate an alternative way of living; isolated individuals cannot. The number 10 may be psychologically related to the stipulation of 10 people for a minyan, the quorum for public worship, the point at which an assembly of individuals becomes a group, a congregation. - *Harold Kushner, editor of the d'rash commentary, Etz Hayim [New York: The Rabbinical Assembly, 2001], p. 104*

Rashi suggests that Abraham's challenge to God to save the lives of the people of Sodom was actually in God's best interest. -Rashi on Genesis 18:25

Midrash Tanchuma points out that Abraham could have offered an extremely strong argument: "Yesterday You told me, 'In Isaac shall your seed be called' (Genesis 21:12) and today you say to me 'Offer him there for a burnt offering' (Genesis 22:2)." Even further: from the case of Sodom and Gemorrah, we see that Abraham was able to argue with God, and had no fear doing so (Genesis 18:25 - "Far be it from You..."). But just here, where this affects the depths of his spiritual existence, he remains silent.

QUESTIONS:

1. WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO SPEAK OUT IN THE FACE OF INJUSTICE?
2. IS JUSTICE UNIVERSAL, OR IS JUSTICE FOR YOURSELF DIFFERENT THEN JUSTICE FOR OTHERS?
3. IS IT ACCEPTABLE THAT SOME INNOCENTS SUFFER FOR A GREATER GOOD?
4. DO YOU JUDGE YOURSELF MORE HARSHLY, OR MORE GENTLY, THAN YOU JUDGE OTHERS?

D'var Torah:

Here we have Abraham, one of the most significant figures in all of human history, known for his righteousness, sense of justice, and intimacy with God. When God approaches Abraham with the information that the wicked people of Sodom are going to be destroyed for their evil ways, Abraham argues passionately with God in order to save the people. Abraham appeals to God's sense of mercy and justice, pointing out particularly that no innocent people should perish along with the wicked; better the wicked go unpunished then even one innocent person suffer unjustly. And so Abraham barters God down: save the city if there are fifty innocent people, forty, thirty, and so on. In the end God acquiesces to Abraham's sense of justice, but, alas, not enough innocent people are

Vayeira (Genesis 18:1-22:24)

found. So while Abraham's closest relatives are saved, the city of Sodom is destroyed.

So what's the problem? What troubles the commentators, and most readers, is that God next approaches Abraham and asks him to take his beloved son Isaac, the one through whom God has promised Abraham that he would become a great nation, and offer him up as a sacrifice on Mount Moriah. Now, the question becomes, how could Abraham so assiduously argue on behalf of the lives of the innocent of Sodom, who were all strangers to him and known particularly for their wickedness, and not say a word to save the life of his own son, the child of his old age, whom he loved above all others, and who was the only chance for the fulfillment of the covenantal promise? At this point, all Abraham is noted for is his silence.

The midrash indicates that Abraham had a very good argument to make to God, if he chose to do so. It also points out that God did not seem to take exception to Abraham's challenges. Had he decided to question God's command, he had nothing to fear. However, in the end, Abraham seems to choose silence over debate. His silence, though, is not out of fear, nor out of intimidation, but rather, Abraham, the ultimate man of faith, chooses silence as the highest expression of his faith.

Again, following the midrashic understanding, the distinction is made between Abraham's debate with God over the fate of Sodom, which was an issue of justice, and the matter of making the supreme sacrifice in fulfillment of God's command, which is an intensely personal act of faith. Abraham's sense of justice guided his actions in regard to others. And he expected his God to be just as well. In regard to himself though, Abraham was guided purely by faith and commitment to God. He trusted God, and expected that God's requests of him were only for the best. In the end, he was rewarded for his faith, and everything did work out. His faith paid off.

Trusting others, and trusting God, is a very difficult thing to do. We may not all have made the same choice as Abraham, and that is okay, because it was a profoundly personal choice. We may not even be comfortable with the choice Abraham made for himself. But, Abraham led out of his love of God, not fear of God, and was uncompromising in his faith. This type of leadership, combined with his sense of justice, is what made Abraham such an extraordinary figure.

Chayyei Sarah (Genesis 23:1-25:18)

Overview:
The portion *Chayyei Sarah* - the "life of Sarah"- serves as a bridge between the story of Abraham and Sarah and the next generations. Sarah dies, and Abraham buys the cave of Machpelah in which to bury her. Abraham then sends his servant to find a wife for his son Isaac; the servant finds Rebecca, and we meet her family, including her brother Lavan, who will figure prominently in the story of Yaakov, Rachel, and Leah. At the end of the portion, Abraham dies, and is buried by his two sons, Isaac and Ishmael.

וַיִּהְיוּ חַיֵּי שָׂרָה, מֵאָה שָׁנָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וְשֶׁבַע שָׁנִים--שְׁנֵי, חַיֵּי שָׂרָה

Sarah lived to be 127 years old - such was the span of Sarah's life. (Genesis 23:1).

Commentary:
The reason the word *shanah* - "year" - is written at every term is to tell you that each term must be explained by itself as a complete number: at the age of one hundred she was a woman of twenty as regards sin - for just as at the age of twenty one may regard her as having never sinned, since she had not then reached the age when she was subject to punishment. So, too, when she was one hundred years old she was sinless, and when she was twenty she was as beautiful as when she was seven. - Rashi on Genesis 23:1

"And Sara was a hundred...": "The Lord knows the days of the perfect, and their inheritance shall be forever" (*Tehilim* 37:18) – just as they are perfect, so are their years perfect. -*Bereishit Rabba* 58:1

The Midrash states: "Just as they are perfect, so are their years perfect." And Rashi explains: "'The years of Sara's life' – they were all equally good." This is the trait of equanimity mentioned in the book "Duties of the Heart." It is a great virtue that a person should stand firm in his perfection in all that passes over him. There is a trial for one who is poor, and a trial for one who is wealthy. Sarah, in her early years, lived through various difficult periods – through hunger, through being taken by Pharaoh's and Avimelekh. And in their later years, [Avraham and Sara] had all that is good, but nothing changed in her, despite all these changes. This is what the Mishna [means when is] says: "With ten trials was Avraham Avinu tried and he stood firm through all, to show how great was the love of Avraham Avinu, may he rest in peace" (Avot 5:4). This means: his great love for the Holy One, blessed be He. All the winds in the world could not budge him from his place. He stood

Chayyei Sarah (Genesis 23:1-25:18)

firm in his perfection, feeling nothing whatsoever of all that passed over him. Unlike ordinary mortals who undergo several changes every day, they never changed throughout their years. About them it says: "She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life" (Mishlei 31:12), despite all kinds of vicissitudes and trials, in poverty and in wealth. -Sefat Emet, Chayyei Sarah, 5656

QUESTIONS:

1. WHAT, FOR YOU, CONSTITUTES A "GOOD DAY"? WHAT CONSTITUTES A "BAD DAY"? HOW DO YOU MEASURE GOODNESS AND BADNESS?
2. THINK OF A PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT TIME IN YOUR LIFE. WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM THAT EXPERIENCE? HOW DOES IT INFLUENCE YOU AS A LEADER NOW?
3. THE MIDRASH THAT RASHI QUOTES FROM BERESHIT RABBAH TELLS US THAT SARAH'S LIFE WAS GOOD. ANOTHER IN THE SAME SOURCE (45:5) TELLS US THAT SARAH'S LIFE WAS SHORTENED FROM ITS POTENTIAL BECAUSE OF SARAH'S TREATMENT OF HAGAR. HOW DO WE RECONCILE THE GOOD AND THE BAD IN THE LIFE OF ONE PERSON? IS GOODNESS AN IMPORTANT QUALITY IN A LEADER?

D'var Torah:

We can all identify many different stages in our own lives. In fact, in today's world, most of us will probably go through more transitions and different periods over the course of our lives then our ancestors did even just one or two generations ago. The whole notion of the developmental stage of adolescence is a modern concept, and having an independent life after we have moved out of our parent's home, but before we marry and establish a family of our own, is really only a phenomenon of less than the last century. While our parents usually looked to establish a career that would see them through their workings lives, social commentators and career counselors today advise that we should be prepared for at least three different careers or major changes in our career path throughout the length of our working days. The days of our lives will have to be broken down into a lot more than Sarah's.

But that simply makes Rashi's point, supported and enhanced by the *Sefat Emet*, even more poignant for us today. With the benefit of hindsight, at the end of her life, Rashi describes all of Sarah's days as "good." But we know enough about the life of Sarah to know that her life was not always easy, and, in fact, was quite painful and difficult at times. Sarah endured many long physical (and spiritual) journeys of hardship, leaving her home at an early age. She had to cope with barrenness for most of her life, witness her husband father a son by another woman, and then endured a pregnancy

Chayyei Sarah (Genesis 23:1-25:18)

and birth at an advanced age. She was taken into the harems of two different kings, and survived famines, drought and war. And then, at the end of her life, our tradition teaches us, she died prematurely from the shock of the information that her husband had tried to sacrifice their only son. So how can this be described as a life that was "good"?

What was good was not necessarily Sarah's life, but rather, how Sarah lived her life. It is always easy to shine and be righteous when life is easy. What truly defines a righteous person is how they act when things are difficult. Sarah went through a number of different stages in her life, and a number of very difficult periods, but, Rashi tells us, she maintained her goodness and righteousness equally throughout all the experiences of her life. *Chayyei Sarah* is not a retelling of Sarah's life. Rather, it is an accounting, at the end of her days, of how well she lived the life that she was given.

We will all go through many stages in our lives. Some will be periods of great growth, joy and productivity, others may be periods that are dark, difficult, and even depressing. What counts is not the quality of our days, but how well we live those days. If you can get through those difficult days and see that you maintained yourself as a decent person throughout, then your behavior will still define those days as "good," even if the days themselves were not. As they say, you can make the best of a bad situation, or you can make a bad situation worse. We can learn and grow from all of our experiences, even, or perhaps most particularly, from the most difficult. It is all a matter of how you look at it. Our tradition looked at Sarah's days, the good and the bad, the pleasant and the difficult, and saw that, in the larger context, all were good, one way or another. At the end of your days, will you, or others, be able to look back and say that all the days of your life were "good"?

Toldot (Genesis 25:19-28:9)

Overview: The Torah portion *Toldot* is really the only one in which Isaac and Rebecca are the main characters; it begins with the birth of Jacob and Esau, who are portrayed as struggling even in the womb. The twins have several tragic encounters in this portion: Jacob convinces Esau (the older son) to sell his birthright for a bowl of lentils, and later, after the family has travelled to Gerar and dealt with some property problems left over from Abraham, Jacob dresses up like his brother in order to receive the better blessing from their old and blind father. Fearing for his life, Rebecca sends Jacob off to find a wife from among her clan, thus setting up the next several *parshiot,* which tell of Jacob's adventures and spiritual growth.

וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב, הִשָּׁבְעָה לִּי כַּיּוֹם,
וַיִּשָּׁבַע, לוֹ ; וַיִּמְכֹּר אֶת-בְּכֹרָתוֹ,
לְיַעֲקֹב.
וְיַעֲקֹב נָתַן לְעֵשָׂו, לֶחֶם וּנְזִיד
עֲדָשִׁים, וַיֹּאכַל וַיֵּשְׁתְּ, וַיָּקָם וַיֵּלֶךְ ;
וַיִּבֶז עֵשָׂו, אֶת-הַבְּכֹרָה

But Jacob said, "Confirm it to me by oath here and now." So he swore it to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. Jacob then gave Esau bread and lentil stew. He ate, drank, got up and left. Thus did Esau disdain his birthright. (Genesis 25:33-34)

Commentary:
Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright." Because you are completely occupied with hunting and other activities in a manner that causes you to be so weary that you can't even name the lentil stew. Therefore, you will not be able to occupy yourself with the obligations of the birthright including serving God. -Sforno, on Genesis 25:31

Perhaps this scenario is a bit too precious, too late-nineties, too much Manhattan's Upper West Side. The point's the same in any case, the chasm between brothers' cultures is virtually unbridgeable. Whatever the distinction between hunting in the fields and dwelling among the tents, Jacob pretends to a refinement that Esau is not only lacking, but does not even notice. . . .

This crudeness must serve as a goad to wily Jacob. How can this boor, he thinks, have any clue what primogeniture means? He probably cannot even spell it. What will Esau do with all that capital, invest it in net traps? Jacob would invest it in the right portfolio, perhaps with a somewhat aggressive ratio leaning to high-tech stocks. In a slightly earlier era he'd use the double portion of the birthright for risk arbitrage or floating junk bonds. Clearly, Jacob deserved the bulk of their father's estate, not this lug, no matter whom Father favored. -Burton L.

Toldot (Genesis 25:19-28:9)

Visotsky, *The Genesis of Ethics* [New York: Crown Publishing Group, 1997], p. 138

The righteous eat to the satisfying of his desire (Prov. 13:25). Such was Eliezer the servant of Abraham who said to our mother Rebekah: "Give me to drink, I pray thee, a little water of thy pitcher" (Gen. 24:17)—one drink satisfied him. But the belly of the wicked shall want (Prov. 13:25). Such was the wicked Esau who said to our father Jacob: "Stuff me, I pray thee, with this red, red pottage" (Gen. 25:30). R. Isaac bar R. Ze'era explained: This wicked man opened his mouth wide as though he were a camel and said, "I have my mouth open, keep putting food into it." The words "stuff me" are associated with the feeding of a camel, as we read in a mishnah: "On the Sabbath you must not make a manger of the camel's stomach, nor push food into his gullet, but you may stuff it into his mouth" -Mishnah Shabbat 24:3, *P'sikta D'Rav Kahana* 6:2

Rabbi Dovid Bliacher, z.l., explains the contrast between one "who dwells in the tent" and one who is "a man of the field" in the following manner. These two descriptions suggest polarized life orientations. The yosheiv ohalim is one who maintains a disciplined lifestyle, living within a framework of predetermined restrictions. His theological consciousness and philosophical speculation is limited to his level of understanding. He is acutely aware of his inability to gain insight into matters which are beyond his sphere of comprehension. His faith and trust carry him through moments of ambiguity. He does not sense that his intellectual capacity is "stunted" by the limits on thought and activity. He realizes that man must live in the confines of discipline. . . .

In contrast to this orientation is the ish sadeh, the free thinking individual who does not live within the framework of Divine restriction and obedience. -A. L. Scheinbaum, Peninim on the Torah [Cleveland Heights: Peninim Publications, 1996], p. 35

QUESTIONS:

1. WHAT IS IT ABOUT SERVICE TO GOD THAT REQUIRES SO MUCH ENERGY AND ATTENTION? IS NOT FAITH SUFFICIENT?
2. IN THE MODERN CONTEXT GIVEN ABOVE, HOW MIGHT ESAU BETTER USE THE MONEY TO EARN THE BIRTHRIGHT? HOW MIGHT THAT APPLY TO THE WAY WE THINK ABOUT AND USE MONEY?
3. WHY IS SATING ONESELF SO EASILY ASSOCIATED WITH THE BEHAVIOR OF THE WICKED?
4. HOW CAN WE BALANCE SELF-DISCIPLINE AND FREE THINKING TO BETTER COPE WITH AMBIGUITY AND DISCONTENT IN OUR LIVES? HOW DOES THAT INFLUENCE THE WAY WE LEAD?

Toldot (Genesis 25:19-28:9)

D'var Torah:
Torah admonishes us not to live exclusively for the moment lest we forget that tomorrow will bring new challenges and new blessings. The Torah portion *Toldot* highlights the struggle between this instant and the thousands of tomorrows that follow. How much should we focus on our immediate circumstances? Maslow's hierarchy of needs tells us that we cannot focus on tomorrow when today we lack the basics of food and shelter (Abraham Harold Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being* [Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 1998]). On the other hand, to become immersed in only the present is to ignore the possible and suppress the potential of each new day.

By looking at the story of Jacob and Esau, we can learn to seek a balance between our desires of the moment and our obligations to the future, which is essential for a leader to do. Esau is an accomplished outdoorsman; his brother, Jacob, is the quiet and contemplative one. Following a long day in the field, Esau returns home. Many translate the word *ayeif* as "tired" or "exhausted," not "famished." So he returns from the field tired. As he approaches his home, he finds Jacob cooking a "red" stew. Able to identify the food only as "red," he asks that it be given to him. Jacob asks for his birthright blessing in return. Esau agrees, saying he has no use for it, as he is about to die.

Several questions immediately arise, and each answer helps resolve the questions that follow. Why is Esau so interested in food if he is so very tired? The text never really tells us that Esau is "famished." Rather, the Hebrew asserts that he is worn-out, he is tired. Tired of what—his work in the field? Rashi and other commentators observe that Esau spends time considering his birthright blessing (Rashi on Genesis 25:32). It is not simply an inheritance. What is the birthright blessing? Ibn Ezra notes that it entitles Esau to a double share of his father's estate. But the birthright blessing also represents an obligation to the future—an opportunity to share in the creation of a legacy for subsequent generations and a commitment to the Jewish people and Jewish life.

Certainly there were benefits associated with the birthright, but there were also responsibilities. From Rashi we learn that Esau's exhaustion is more spiritual than physical. He is tired of the obligations of family life, tired of the responsibilities associated with Jewish living, and weary of the limitations placed on him daily by his pledge to the future. Would it not be easier simply to ignore tomorrow and live only for today? And so, with the stew as collateral, Esau abandons his future. More than opting out of his birthright, Esau ridicules it by trading it for a simple bowl of stew.

Esau is tired of living up to potential and tired of being concerned with others and with the future. He wants to live only in and for a particular

Toldot (Genesis 25:19-28:9)

moment, deciding thus to trade his heritage for a bowl of "red stuff." While the lentil stew Jacob makes may be intended for his family, to be eaten upon suffering the forthcoming loss of his father, it also represents the spiritual demise of Esau. But the birthright blessing does not work that way for us. Each of us carries this blessing—the blessing ultimately given to Jacob—as our inheritance. Unlike Esau, we are not free to squander it recklessly. Rather, it is our task, our daily struggle, to uphold our inheritance and through Jewish living, to navigate and balance our desire to live for the moment with our sacred responsibility to be leading others to a better future.

Everyday life is hard for people. All too often we return from our labors drained by the mundane and work-a-day demands placed upon us. The news is filled with people who are too tired to care for their children, too tired to attend to the needs of others, too tired to give of their time and resources for worthy causes, and too tired to care about what comes next.

Our birthright blessing insists not only that we care, but also that we act. It is only through Jewish living, learning, leading and action that we can continually earn our inheritance and redeem ourselves from the spiritual exhaustion that so often afflicts us.

Vayeitzei (Genesis 28:10-32:3)

Overview: In this week's *parashah*, Jacob begins his long journey, both physically and spiritually, from his home and family. Shortly after he leaves home, God appears to Jacob in a dream, presenting the image of the ladder from heaven to earth. God speaks to Jacob and promises him protection, offspring, and the land on which he lies. Jacob then travels on to Haran, where he meets and falls in love with his cousin Rachel, the daughter of his mother's brother Laban. Jacob arranges with Laban to work seven years to marry Rachel. However Laban, who has something of a shady reputation, substitutes his older daughter Leah for Rachel on her wedding night. Jacob confronts Laban, but is told, ironically, that the older has precedent over the younger. Jacob agrees to work seven more years for Rachel as well. Years pass and the sisters, as well as their servants who are given to Jacob as concubines, bear Jacob twelve sons and a daughter. These sons will become the ancestors of the 12 tribes of Israel. At the end of the portion, Jacob and his family depart from Haran and from Laban, and begin their journey back to Canaan.

וּלְלָבָן, שְׁתֵּי בָנוֹת: שֵׁם הַגְּדֹלָה לֵאָה,
וְשֵׁם הַקְּטַנָּה רָחֵל
וְעֵינֵי לֵאָה, רַכּוֹת; וְרָחֵל, הָיְתָה,
יְפַת-תֹּאַר, וִיפַת מַרְאֶה
וַיֶּאֱהַב יַעֲקֹב, אֶת-רָחֵל; וַיֹּאמֶר,
אֶעֱבָדְךָ שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים, בְּרָחֵל בִּתְּךָ,
הַקְּטַנָּה

Now Laban had two daughters; the elder was named Leah, and the younger was named Rachel. Leah eyes were weak; but Rachel was beautiful of form and of face. Jacob was in love with Rachel; so he said, "I will work for you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel."
(Genesis 29:16 - 18)

Commentary:

Leah was destined to marry Esau and Rachel to marry Jacob. Leah sat at the crossroads asking about Esau, and they told her, "Oh, he's a wicked man." Hearing this, she cried bitterly, "My sister Rachel and I were born of the same womb, yet Rachel is to marry the righteous man and I, the wicked Esau." She wept and fasted until her sight became weak.
- *Tanchuma Vayeitzei* 4

As we have listened for centuries to the voices of men and the theories of development that their experience informs, so we have come more recently to notice not only the silence of women but the difficulty in hearing what they say when they speak. Yet in the different voice of

Vayeitzei (Genesis 28:10-32:3)

women lies the truth of an ethic of care, the tie between relationship and responsibility, and the origins of aggression in the failure of connection. -Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, Harvard University Press, 1982, p. 173

Jacob said to Leah: "You are a deceiver and the daughter of a deceiver!" "Is there a teacher without pupils?" she retorted. "Didn't your father call you Esau, and you answered him! So did you call me, and I answered you!" Genesis *Rabbah* 70:19

At that moment, our mother Rachel broke forth into speech before the Holy One, blessed be He, and said, "Sovereign of the Universe, it is revealed before You that Your servant Jacob loved me exceedingly and toiled for my father on my behalf seven years. When those seven years were completed and the time arrived for my marriage with my husband, it came to my attention that my father was conspiring to switch my sister for me. It was very hard for me, because the plot was known to me and I disclosed it to my husband; and I gave him a sign whereby he could distinguish between me and my sister, so that my father should not be able to make the substitution. After that I relented, suppressed my desire, and had pity upon my sister that she should not be exposed to shame. In the evening they substituted my sister for me with my husband, and I delivered over to my sister all the signs which I had arranged with my husband so that he should think that she was Rachel. More than that — I went beneath the bed upon which he lay with my sister; and when he spoke to her she remained silent and I made all the replies in order that he should not recognize my sister's voice. I was kind to her, was not jealous of her, and did not expose her to shame. And if I, a creature of flesh and blood, formed of dust and ashes, was not envious of my rival and did not expose her to shame and contempt, why should You, a King Who lives eternally and are merciful, be jealous of idolatry in which there is no reality, and exile my children and let them be slain by the sword, and their enemies have done with them as they wished!" At that God's mercy is touched and He responds:"For you Rachel I will return Israel to their place." – Eicha Rabbah intro 24.

QUESTIONS:

1. THE WORD FOR "WEAK" CAN ALSO BE TRANSLATED AS "DELICATE" OR "SOFT." WHAT DIFFERENCES DO THESE TRANSLATIONS CONVEY ABOUT LEAH? (SEE *TANCHUMA VAYEITZEI*) WHAT DOES THIS SAY ABOUT LEAH'S POWER AND STYLE OF LEADERSHIP?
2. HOW DO YOU THINK THAT THE OFTEN SILENT VOICES OF WOMEN IN THE TORAH CAN BE HEARD?
3. WOULD IT MAKE SENSE TO SEE RACHEL AND LEAH AS TWO ASPECTS OF THE SAME PERSON?
4. IS SILENCE A STYLE OF LEADERSHIP?

D'var Torah:

The relationship between Leah and Rachel is one of the most complex sibling relationships in the Torah. Other siblings are either locked in rivalry (Cain and Abel) or work together cooperatively (Moses, Aaron, and Miriam). Leah and Rachel, one of the few sister pairs, present a more complex relationship. As Jacob's wives, they seem to be

rivals, vying for his attention, affection, and ability to produce children. However, their childhood relationship is veiled in the silence of the text. Since they did not have a mother (as suggested by tradition), there was probably an emotional vacuum that drew the girls together in a mutually supporting "self-mothering" bond. They may also have been competitors for the affection of their father as they were for Jacob's love.

As our texts suggest, however, their underlying relationship of mutual concern was not disrupted entirely. On the surface, they seem to be rivals and competitors; however, the insights of our tradition and imaginations present a picture of silent partners, allies for a greater purpose.

Our own relationships with our siblings, parents, children, and friends are also combinations of caring, competition, jealousy, and concern. By getting "inside" the printed text to hear the voices of our biblical families, we can get a sense of different styles of leadership, and understand and elevate the important relationships in our own lives. We, too, can examine ourselves and determine how to be allies for a greater purpose of leading the Jewish people.

Vayishlach (Genesis 32:4-36:43)

Overview: The saga of Jacob continues as Jacob sends messengers ahead to greet his brother Esau, who swore to kill Jacob when they last parted some twenty years before. Jacob is informed that Esau has a large assembly of men coming toward Jacob, seemingly prepared for battle. Jacob responds with a three-pronged strategy in preparation for the confrontation: Prayer, Diplomacy and War. But the night before he confronts his brother, Jacob spends the night wrestling with an angel and, in the end, has his name changed by God to Israel. The next morning, much to his surprise, the encounter with Esau goes peacefully, and again they part. Esau returns to Seir and Jacob settles outside of the city of Shechem. There, Jacob's daughter Dinah is raped by a prince of the town, and, in retaliation, Jacob's sons go on a violent rampage, killing the entire male population of Shechem. At the end of the portion, both Rachel and Isaac die and are buried. The *parashah* ends with a review of all Isaac's descendants.

וַיֹּאמֶר, יַעֲקֹב, אֱלֹהֵי אָבִי אַבְרָהָם, וֵאלֹהֵי
אָבִי יִצְחָק: יְהוָה הָאֹמֵר אֵלַי, שׁוּב לְאַרְצְךָ
וּלְמוֹלַדְתְּךָ--וְאֵיטִיבָה עִמָּךְ
קָטֹנְתִּי מִכֹּל הַחֲסָדִים, וּמִכָּל-הָאֱמֶת, אֲשֶׁר
עָשִׂיתָ, אֶת-עַבְדֶּךָ: כִּי בְמַקְלִי, עָבַרְתִּי אֶת-
הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה, וְעַתָּה הָיִיתִי, לִשְׁנֵי מַחֲנוֹת.
הַצִּילֵנִי נָא מִיַּד אָחִי, מִיַּד עֵשָׂו: כִּי-יָרֵא
אָנֹכִי, אֹתוֹ--פֶּן-יָבוֹא וְהִכַּנִי, אֵם עַל-בָּנִים
וְאַתָּה אָמַרְתָּ, הֵיטֵב אֵיטִיב עִמָּךְ; וְשַׂמְתִּי
אֶת-זַרְעֲךָ כְּחוֹל הַיָּם, אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יִסָּפֵר מֵרֹב

Then Jacob said, "God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, Adonai, who said to me, 'Return to your native land and I will make things go well with you!' I am unworthy of all the proofs of mercy and all the faithfulness that You have shown Your servant: For I crossed this Jordan with [nothing but] my walking stick, and now I have become [these] two camps! Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau! I am afraid of him, lest he advance on me and strike me, mother [falling] on child. Yet You said, 'I will make things go well with you and make your descendants like the grains of sand along the seashore, which are too many to be counted.'"
(Genesis 32:10-13)

Commentary:

"You have said, 'I will deal bountifully with you'" I will deal bountifully with you for your

Vayishlach (Genesis 32:4-36:43)

own sake [or, by your own merit]; and I will deal bountifully with you for the sake of [or, by the merit of] your ancestors, *z'chut avot*. -*B'reishit Rabbah* 76:7

Jacob's prayer, showing his humility and gratitude, is proof that misfortune had developed the nobler impulses of his heart. Twenty years of fixed principle, steadfast purpose, and resolute sacrifice of present for future, purify and ennoble. It proves that even from the first, though he may appear self-centered, Jacob is delicately sensitive to spiritual realities and capable of genuine reformation. -J. H. Hertz. ed., *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs* [Brooklyn, NY: Soncino Press, 1960], p. 122

"In other words," writes "... [Unlike in last week's parashah] Jacob's prayer no longer tries to make a deal with God, nor does it present God with a long list of demands—food, clothing, prosperity, a safe return. It acknowledges that there is no currency in which God can be paid for blessing and helping us. Jacob's mature prayer says simply, 'God, I have no claims on You and nothing to offer You. You have already given me more than I had any right to expect. There is only one reason for my turning to You now—because I need You. I am scared; I have to face something hard tomorrow, and I am not sure I can do it alone, without You. God, You once gave me reason to believe that I was capable of making something of my life. If You meant it, then You had better help me now, because I can't handle this alone.'" -Rabbi Harold Kushner, When Bad Things Happen to Good People, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1982.

QUESTIONS:

1. HOW DOES THE MIDRASH IN *B'REISHIT RABBAH* APPLY THE PRINCIPLE OF "MERIT OF OUR ANCESTORS"/ *Z'CHUT AVOT*? HOW DOES THAT RELATE TO THE WAY JACOB ADDRESSES GOD IN HIS PRAYER?

2. THE HERTZ COMMENTARY WANTS US TO SEE JACOB AS A HERO AND EXPLAIN AWAY HIS PAST INDISCRETIONS. HOW DO YOU SEE HIM? DOES ACKNOWLEDGING THAT HE IS NOT PERFECT TARNISH HIS IMAGE? DOES THAT HELP OR HARM YOUR ABILITY TO RELATE TO HIM AS A LEADER?
3. ARE STRUGGLE, FAILURE, AND HURT NECESSARY FOR GROWTH? HOW DO WE LEARN FROM OUR ERRORS IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE *SH'LEIMUT*, "WHOLENESS" AS A LEADER?

Vayishlach (Genesis 32:4-36:43)

D'var Torah:
There is a rabbinic principle called *z'chut avot*, literally, "the merit of the fathers." This principle means that we, as descendants of the biblical heroes, may be rewarded or are entitled to petition God for some favor not only by virtue of what **we** ourselves may have done, but also by virtue of the merit of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and others. It is not unlike someone applying to an Ivy League college who mentions that a parent and grandparent are alumni. It couldn't hurt!

This principle of *z'chut avot* is employed most obviously in Jewish liturgy, in the first blessing of the *Amidah*. The prayer begins, "We praise You, *Adonai* our God and God of our ancestors; God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob." (Egalitarian versions of the prayer add: "God of Sarah, God of Rebekah, God of Rachel, and God of Leah.") The rabbis who developed the liturgy many centuries ago felt that before we continue with the other blessings, prayers asking God for life and health, for well-being and peace, we should introduce ourselves, so to speak, and remind God that **we** are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, each of whom God knew in a different way. If today, four thousand years later, we are benefiting because of the greatness of these biblical ancestors, then it should follow that they were indeed noble and blameless—true models for us to emulate.

If, however, we read the stories of Jacob carefully, we might reach a different conclusion. This is the man whose name means "heel." This is the man who tricked his brother into selling him the birthright, who disguised himself as Esau in order to deceive their blind father and receive the blessing of the firstborn. This is the Jacob who, after dreaming a revelatory dream of a stairway to heaven, makes a vow that seems more like a business proposition. He says, "If God remains with me, if He protects me on this journey that I am making, and gives me bread to eat and clothing to wear, and if I return safely to my father's house—*Adonai* shall be my God... and of all that You give me, I will set aside a tithe for You" (Genesis 28:20–22). There are so many "ifs" in that vow that it sounds more like a child addressing Santa Claus. Jacob's promise of exclusive worship and even monetary reward if God will provide protection, food, clothing, and a round-trip ticket is not unlike saying, "I'll be good and clean up my room if you give me a new bicycle."

But our *parashah* shows us that even a heel can grow up and learn from experience. The Jacob who addresses God in chapter 32 is a different man than the youth whom we previously met fleeing the wrath of his brother. In the intervening twenty years, he has married, fathered many children, worked very hard, and amassed a small fortune. He is about to confront his brother Esau, who threatened to kill him before they parted. He is afraid and he is humbled, and his prayer reflects his

Vayishlach (Genesis 32:4-36:43)

maturity and revised self-image. He begins by addressing God with an understanding of the principle of *z'chut avot* and continues with grateful acknowledgment that his wealth and good fortune are ultimately the result of God's kindness.

If Jacob is a leader for us to emulate, then it is **this** Jacob, the one who through his struggles "with beings divine and human" (Genesis 32:29) becomes Israel, from whom we can learn the most. This Jacob no longer swaggers, but limps. This Jacob is beginning to understand the nuances and challenges of family life, and though he will repeat his father's mistake of playing favorites with his children, this Jacob has taken on the responsibilities of being a parent and providing for his family. And this Jacob finally understands that, despite his wealth and prestige, without God's help, he is powerless.

We all have our good and bad moments, our times of infantile demands and our realization of our own limits. May ***this*** Jacob be the role model we seek to grow in wisdom, in understanding, and in leadership.

Vayeshev (Genesis 37:1-40:23)

Overview: This portion begins the concluding drama of the book of Genesis, the story of Joseph and his 11 brothers, their estrangement and eventual reunion. Joseph is the favored son, and acts like it, so his brothers conspire to throw him in a pit, then sell him into slavery, then tell Jacob that Joseph was attacked by an animal. He ends up in Egypt, as the servant of a powerful man, Potiphar. Meanwhile, his brother Judah is having problems of his own; his sons die childless, and he refuses to give his daughter-in-law Tamar to his youngest son so he may have children. She dresses like a prostitute, entices Judah to sleep with her, and she is vindicated as having acted correctly in the end, and bears children. Potiphar's wife desires Joseph, and when he refuses, he is thrown into prison, where he ends up interpreting the dreams of Pharaoh's servants, which will eventually bring him to the attention of Pharaoh himself.

וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל-יוֹסֵף, הֲלוֹא אַחֶיךָ רֹעִים
בִּשְׁכֶם--לְכָה, וְאֶשְׁלָחֲךָ אֲלֵיהֶם ; וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ, הִנֵּנִי
וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ, לֶךְ-נָא רְאֵה אֶת-שְׁלוֹם אַחֶיךָ וְאֶת-
שְׁלוֹם הַצֹּאן, וַהֲשִׁבֵנִי, דָּבָר ; וַיִּשְׁלָחֵהוּ מֵעֵמֶק
חֶבְרוֹן, וַיָּבֹא שְׁכֶמָה
וַיִּמְצָאֵהוּ אִישׁ, וְהִנֵּה תֹעֶה בַּשָּׂדֶה ; וַיִּשְׁאָלֵהוּ הָאִישׁ
לֵאמֹר, מַה-תְּבַקֵּשׁ
וַיֹּאמֶר, אֶת-אַחַי אָנֹכִי מְבַקֵּשׁ ; הַגִּידָה-נָּא לִי,
אֵיפֹה הֵם רֹעִים
וַיֹּאמֶר הָאִישׁ, נָסְעוּ מִזֶּה--כִּי שָׁמַעְתִּי אֹמְרִים,
נֵלְכָה דֹתָיְנָה ; וַיֵּלֶךְ יוֹסֵף אַחַר אֶחָיו, וַיִּמְצָאֵם
בְּדֹתָן

Israel said to Joseph, "Surely your brothers are tending the flock at Shechem [by now]. Come, let me send you to them." He answered, "Here I am!" Israel then said to him, "Pray go see how your brothers are, and how the flock is doing, and bring me back word." So he sent him from the valley of Hebron and he came to Shechem. [There] a man happened on him as he was wandering in the countryside. The man asked him: What are you looking for? He said, "I'm looking for my brothers. Can you tell me please where they are tending the flock?" The man said, "They left this place; yes, I heard them say, Let's go to Dothan." So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan. (Genesis 37:13-17)

Commentary:

Interwoven into the account of moral doings is the unseen hand of Divine Providence. On the surface, the actors in the story set in motion their own plans, succeed or fail, start again, all on their own initiative. That is the

Vayeshev (Genesis 37:1-40:23)

immediate superficial impression. In fact, however, it transpires that it is Divine Providence which is carrying out, through mankind, its own predestined plan. - Nehama Leibowitz, *Studies in Bereshit*, 3d rev. ed. [Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1976], p. 394

Rabbi Chanina and Rabbi Y' hoshua ben Levi once went to the Roman proconsul in Caesarea. As soon as he saw them, he rose. The others present asked, "Why did you rise for them?" He responded, "I see in their faces the faces of angels." -Jerusalem Talmud, *B' rachot* 5:1

"Do not ascend My altar by steps, that your nakedness may not be exposed upon it" (Exodus 20:26). Here is an inference from "minor to major." The stones of the altar have no sense of what is proper or not proper, and yet the Holy One, blessed be He, said, "Do not treat them disrespectfully." Is it not right, therefore, that with other human beings who are created in the image of the One who spoke and the world came into being—is it not right that they should be treated with dignity? --M'chilta, Yitro 11

Listen to Me, all who pursue justice, all who seek the Eternal! Look to the rock from which you were hewn, the quarry from which you were cut! -Isaiah 51:1

Michelangelo said that he did not make his sculpture; rather he said that it was already embedded in the marble and he merely uncovered it. But human beings are a different matter. Just because we are hewn from the Rock, which is God or the bedrock of our ancestors, that does not give us any kind of elevated status. Each of us has to carve the rock to show the true beauty beneath. –Rabbi Cy Stanway

QUESTIONS:

1. WHAT DID THE ROMAN SENSE IN THE JEWS THAT MADE HIM SEE THE "FACES OF ANGELS"? WHAT DOES THE MAN WHO HELPS JOSEPH TEACH US ABOUT HAVING THE FACES OF ANGELS?
2. THE MAN JOSEPH MEETS SHOWS HIM COURTESY AND RESPECT BY ANSWERING HIS QUESTION AND GUIDING HIM TOWARD HIS BROTHERS. BY TREATING HIM WITH DIGNITY, THE MAN MAY HAVE CAUSED JOSEPH TO THINK ABOUT HOW HE MAY HAVE TREATED HIS BROTHERS BADLY. IS YOUR BEHAVIOR A MODEL OF HOW YOU WANT TO BE TREATED? CAN WE EXPECT RESPECT FROM OTHERS WITHOUT MODELING IT IN OUR EVERYDAY LIVES?
3. IF EACH OF US HAS TO CARVE THE ROCK TO SHOW THE TRUE BEAUTY BENEATH, WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TODAY TO EXPOSE THAT WHICH IS "POSITIVELY DIVINE".

Vayeshev (Genesis 37:1-40:23)

D'var Torah:

I have always found this passage fascinating. Out of nowhere a "man" appears—unnamed and unknown—and provides direction. He points Joseph toward Dothan, a small habitation that is seemingly not very important in the course of Jewish history. And in that one sentence—one simple word—the "man" changes the course of Jewish history. All of a sudden, the small village of Dothan takes on extreme importance.

Dothan is mentioned twice in the *Tanach*. In addition to the Joseph story, it is mentioned in one of the Elisha narratives. Elisha, the protégé of Elijah, is in Dothan when the Arameans attack Israel. Elisha leads the people from Dothan with divine visions, encouragement, and revelation. From these two stories, we see that Dothan is not just a small village out in the desert. Instead, we see it take on the ambience of a place of revelation. Both Elisha and the man who points Joseph toward Dothan seem to be imbued with the gift of prophecy.

Ibn Ezra, the medieval commentator, suggests that according to the simple reading of the text, the man Joseph meets is simply a passerby. He is not an angel or even a messenger from God. Ramban, also known as Nachmanides, has a different take on this. He says a person's actions are worthless unless they follow what God wants. So, in the words of Nachmanides, "The Holy One, blessed be He, sent him [Joseph] an unwitting guide in order to bring him unto their [that is, his brothers'] hands." The man Joseph meets may act unwittingly, but he is still positioned by God to steer Joseph to where his brothers are.

While at first it seems that these commentaries are contradictory, that is not necessarily the case. Genesis 37:15 contains the word *ish*, "man," twice: first "a man happened on him" and later "the man asked him." According to the Sages, if a word is doubled in a text, there is a deeper meaning. Maybe in this case both Ibn Ezra and Nachmanides are right. Perhaps the "man" is simply a man and not an angel, but at that precise moment in history, he is positioned strategically to guide Joseph to the place where he will be captured by his brothers, sold into slavery, and begin the Egyptian sojourn and servitude that ultimately lead to redemption.

It is remarkable how one chance meeting, one question, or one sentence can change the course of our lives. Most of us can remember one person who inspired us and caused us to change direction. Usually we can only recognize the change in context long after the event has passed. But as we look over the years, we can see clearly how that one meeting sent us into a direction we may not have taken.

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Teachers, parents, rabbis, cantors, and doctors are all expected to be these agents of change, just like the "man" or "angel" in *Vayeishev*. At times, they may even see themselves as uttering divine wisdom, and perhaps they actually do. But in my experience true angels neither see themselves as such nor are even aware of their own impact. And one does not need to have a degree to be such an angel.

There is no question that each moment presents us with an opportunity to lend assistance, like the man who directs Joseph toward Dothan. Showing kindness in an unfortunate situation, smiling when there is only sadness, and offering the gift of hope when there is so much despair are acts that show what it means to live a life of righteousness. We can change lives one kindness at a time, even in ordinary circumstances. The simple act of *g'milut chasadim*—"abundant loving-kindness"—can change lives for the better. And the ability to change lives for the better is our most human strength and angelic gift. When we do, our humanity is fused with our divinity and we become messengers of the Most High. It is then that we can truly change the course of history.

Miketz (Genesis 41:1-44:17)

Overview:
The Joseph saga continues. Pharaoh has had two similar dreams and demands their interpretation. None of his advisors can determine their meaning, but his wine steward remembers Joseph from prison and his gift for dream interpretation. Joseph is brought from the prison before Pharaoh. Joseph interprets Pharaoh' dream as seven years of plenty and seven years of famine that are about to fall upon Egypt. In addition, he suggests ways to manage the plenty to survive the famine. Impressed with his wisdom, Pharaoh appoints him viceroy over all of Egypt. Joseph successfully implements his plan, and is married to the daughter of Potiphar and has two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.

וַיַּכֵּר יוֹסֵף, אֶת-אֶחָיו ; וְהֵם, לֹא הִכִּרֻהוּ

Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him (Genesis 42:8)

As the seven years of famine begin, Jacob sends his sons down to Egypt to seek food. They come before Joseph, who recognizes his brothers, but they do not recognize him. Joseph decides to wait before he reveals himself to them. He demands that they return and bring his youngest brother Benjamin back to Egypt, and to make sure they return, he has Shimon held as a hostage. The brothers return home and tell their father what happened in Egypt. At first he refuses to allow the remaining child of his beloved Rachel to leave him, but as the famine drags on, he is forced to concede. This time all the brothers return to Egypt.

This time Joseph devises a final plot against his brothers. He sends them all back to their home with plenty of food and riches, but he has his personal chalice planted in

Benjamin's bag. After their departure, Joseph sends his steward to accuse them of the theft and bring them back. In a classic cliff-hanger, the *parashah* ends with the brothers fearfully confronting the angry Egyptian viceroy, not knowing he is their brother.

Commentary:

[The] Ramban and others (including the famous novelist Thomas Mann in his Joseph and His Brothers) conclude that Joseph acted in accordance with the path marked out for him by Providence in his dreams. He did not feel himself free to do as he liked but considered that he was destined to play the part of savior and leader of his family. This had been the significance of the dream.... -Nehama Leibowitz in Studies in Bereshit Genesis, Jerusalem: Alpha Press, 1981

Some of our Sages hold that Joseph's repeated accusations were intended to confuse his brothers. Surely they must have known of the extraordinary fact that "a young Hebrew slave" had become viceroy of the country. Joseph might therefore

Miketz (Genesis 41:1-44:17)

have been afraid that they would recognize him as their brother. But by directing violent accusations against them, he reduced such speculation to naught and from then on was able to carry out the plan he had concerning his brothers. - R. Elie Munk, *The Call of the Torah*, Mesorah Publications, 1994

The purpose of Joseph's elaborate ruse is not to torment or embarrass his brothers but to see whether they indeed had changed. Repentance [*t'shuvah*] is more than regret. It includes finding oneself in a similar situation and responding differently. Joseph needs to know whether the brothers will leave Simeon and/or Benjamin to languish in prison, as they once had abandoned him. -David Lieber, *Etz Hayim*, The Jewish Publication Society, 2001

[Joseph] was inclined to make himself known to them as their brother, but an angel appeared unto him, the same that had brought him from Shechem to his brethren at Dothan, and spoke, saying, "These came hither with intent to kill thee." -Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, The Jewish Publication Society, 1969, vol. II, p. 82

QUESTIONS:

1. WHICH TEXT BEST EXPLAINS JOSEPH'S INITIAL TREATMENT OF HIS BROTHERS? WHY?
2. IF YOU ACCEPT THE RAMBAN'S EXPLANATION AS CITED BY NEHAMA LEIBOWITZ, DO YOU THINK THAT JOSEPH COULD HAVE DEVISED A DIFFERENT PLAN THAT WOULD HAVE YIELDED THE SAME RESULTS WITHOUT TORMENTING HIS BROTHERS? PLEASE DESCRIBE IT.
3. BY CITING THE ANGEL'S REAPPEARANCE TO JOSEPH IN EGYPT, WHAT IS GINZBERG SUGGESTING?
4. WHAT DO THE SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS IN THE TEXT TEACH US ABOUT FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIPS?
5. IS *THIS* JOSEPH'S LEADERSHIP STYLE ONE YOU WOULD WANT TO EMULATE?

D'var Torah:

Although God is in control of life and death, we determine how we will relate to one another. Joseph's initial meeting with his brothers might suggest that he was punishing them for their previous actions.

Joseph's leadership challenge was to determine how to reunite the family, thus enabling all its members to continue serving God together. Joseph had to create a situation that would bond the family both physically and spiritually. Through his elaborate scheme, Joseph gives his brothers the opportunity to prove to themselves that they have done *t'shuvah*-that they are indeed men of virtue.

Many people seem to express some surprise that brothers would not recognize each other, especially one whom they so mistreated, and offer a variety of explanations. But most agree on one thing: Joseph, when he had his brothers in his power, recognized them as his brothers, and therefore

acted compassionately towards them. But when the brothers had the young Joseph in their power, they did not recognize their brotherly obligations, and they sold him into slavery. Recognition is not just a matter of seeing and remembering who someone is. Recognition is also remembering how to act. Joseph recognized and acted mercifully. The brothers never recognized Joseph as a brother, even when he lived among them.

Joseph, who long ago realized that his brothers were only following God's decree, has to help them forgive themselves. Only then will they all be able to work together as an *am kadosh*, a holy people. We can use this lesson as leaders to repair tears within our own communities: whether our own or those of past generations, our leadership is required.

Vayigash (Gensis 44:18-47:27)

Overview: Picking up directly from where last week's portion ends, Benjamin stands before Joseph accused of the theft of a chalice. In a very moving plea on behalf of his youngest brother, Judah offers himself in place of Benjamin, so that Jacob should not be bereft of both of his two youngest sons, the only sons of his beloved Rachel. Moved by this act of selflessness, Joseph clears the room and emotionally reveals himself to his brothers. He alleviates their guilt over their past actions by revealing God's hand in all that has happened. Joseph arranges for the entire family to be reunited under his protection in Egypt. The brothers are provided with generous provisions and sent back to Canaan to tell Jacob about Joseph. Jacob decides he must go see his lost son immediately, and he and his entire family, a total of 70 people. along with all their livestock and possessions, go down to Egypt, where Jacob and Joseph are reunited after 22 years. Jacob and some of his sons are introduced to Pharaoh, who settles the family in the Egyptian region of Goshen. The portion concludes with a review of the story of Joseph's experience in Egypt.

וַיָּבֵא יוֹסֵף אֶת-יַעֲקֹב אָבִיו, וַיַּעֲמִדֵהוּ
לִפְנֵי פַרְעֹה ; וַיְבָרֶךְ יַעֲקֹב, אֶת-פַּרְעֹה
וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה, אֶל-יַעֲקֹב : כַּמָּה, יְמֵי
שְׁנֵי חַיֶּיךָ
וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב, אֶל-פַּרְעֹה, יְמֵי שְׁנֵי
מְגוּרַי, שְׁלֹשִׁים וּמְאַת שָׁנָה : מְעַט
וְרָעִים, הָיוּ יְמֵי שְׁנֵי חַיַּי, וְלֹא הִשִּׂיגוּ
אֶת-יְמֵי שְׁנֵי חַיֵּי אֲבֹתַי, בִּימֵי
מְגוּרֵיהֶם
וַיְבָרֶךְ יַעֲקֹב, אֶת-פַּרְעֹה ; וַיֵּצֵא, מִלִּפְנֵי
פַרְעֹה

Joseph then brought his father Jacob and stood him before Pharaoh; and Jacob greeted Pharaoh. Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How many years have you lived?" And Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The span of the years of my lifetime has been 130. Few and miserable have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the length of the days of the years of my fathers when they were alive." Jacob then gave Pharaoh a parting blessing, and he left Pharaoh's presence." (Genesis 47:7-10)

Commentary:

"How many are the days of the years of your life?" This was asked wonderingly, such old age as Jacob reached being rare in Egypt. And since Jacob looked older than his years, the

Vayigash (Gensis 44:18-47:27)

wonder was even greater. - Sforno on Genesis 47:8 in his *Commentary on the Torah*

It is only with a few select people that each day is full of importance and is considered by them as having a special meaning. A really true human being does not live years, but days…. Thus Pharaoh, too, says here: "How many are the days of the years of your life?" And in putting the question "How old are you?" in these words, he reveals the deep impression the dignified behavior of Jacob has made on him. -Samson Raphael Hirsch on Genesis 47:8-9 in his translation of *The Pentateuch*, volume 1, 1959

Our Sages tell us that when Jacob came to Egypt, the land was blessed by his presence and the famine ended. When Pharaoh saw that Jacob was so old, he was afraid that Jacob might not live much longer and that when he died, the blessing might cease. Jacob understood Pharaoh's intention and answered wisely that while he was indeed a hundred and thirty years old, he was still much younger than his fathers [were when they died], and it was the troubles he had experienced that made him look so old. -Sha-agat Aryeh on Genesis 47:9 in Torah Gems, volume 1, p. 332

[Integrity] is the accrued assurance of [one's] proclivity for order and meaning- an experience that conveys some world order and spiritual sense, no matter how dearly it is paid for. It is the acceptance of one's one and only life cycle as something that had to be, and that, by necessity, permitted no substitutions; it thus means a new, a different love of one's parents. The lack or loss of this accrued ego integration is signified by the fear of death: The one and only life cycle is not accepted as the ultimate of life. Despair expresses the feeling that the time is now short, too short for the attempt to start another life and to try out alternate roads to integrity. -Erik Erikson, *The Eight Ages of Man*, in which he characterizes the final stage of life as a struggle between "ego integrity and despair"

One can only imagine that Pharaoh, who was accustomed to being viewed as a god, was brought uncomfortably close to being reminded that he, too, was of flesh. Surely Jacob would have been able to read on Pharaoh's face the desire for him to quickly exit from this audience, and so he lets Pharaoh off the hook by blessing him and leaving. Thus ends Israel's first and only meeting with Egypt on an equal footing. From then on, the House of Israel would look upon Egypt only from a high station or from a low station-or glancing backward from the road as it flees toward its own Land. -Joel Rosenberg, "Alternate Paths to Integrity: On Old

Vayigash (Gensis 44:18-47:27)

Age in the Hebrew Bible" in *A Heart of Wisdom*, edited by Susan Berrin

Og [Pharaoh's servant] would not believe his own eyes; he thought Abraham was standing before him, so close was the resemblance between Jacob and his progenitor. [The midrash assumes that this is the same Pharaoh whom Abraham encountered in Genesis 12.] Then Pharaoh asked about Jacob's age, to find out whether he actually was Jacob and not Abraham. - *Midrash HaGadol I*, 692-3, as cited in Louis Ginzberg's *The Legends of the Jews*, volume 2, page 123

On seeing kings of Israel, one says: "Blessed be the One who has imparted glory to those that fear God." On seeing non-Jewish kings, one says: "Blessed be the One who has imparted glory to God's creatures." -Talmud, *B'rachot* 58a

AND WITH WHAT BLESSING DID HE BLESS HIM? THAT THE NILE SHOULD RISE TO HIS FEET. -RASHI ON GENESIS 47:10

QUESTIONS:

1. HOW DID THESE TWO LEADERS SIZE EACH OTHER UP, AND WHAT DID EACH INTUITIVELY UNDERSTAND ABOUT THE OTHER'S AUTHORITY AND INFLUENCE?
2. WAS PHARAOH'S QUESTION ABOUT JACOB'S AGE AN INSULTING ATTEMPT TO CONTROL AN OLD MAN, OR WAS HE LOOKING TO JACOB FOR SPIRITUAL ADVICE AND WISDOM?
3. CONSIDER WHETHER JACOB'S REVELATION ABOUT HIS AGE WAS A CALCULATED POLITICAL MOVE TO ASSUAGE PHARAOH'S FEARS OR THE CONFESSIONAL BANTER OF A MAN EXPRESSING HIS OWN FEARS. WERE THE BLESSINGS THAT JACOB OFFERED PHARAOH UPON HIS ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE HIS OWN ONE-UPSMANSHIP OF A MAN WHO WAS CONSIDERED A HALF-GOD, OR WERE THEY A GENUINE SPIRITUAL OFFERING?
4. IF THEIRS WAS A MEETING OF EQUALS, AS ROSENBERG SUGGESTS, WAS THERE SUBSTANCE TO THEIR INTERCHANGE, OR WAS IT A LOST OPPORTUNITY?

D'var Torah:

This brief encounter between Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt, and Jacob, the spiritual patriarch of a fledgling tribe of nomads, raises a number of questions about power and spiritual leadership as discussed above. Pondering these questions offers us insight into the psychological and political complexities inherent in Jacob and Pharaoh's meeting and, by extension, in all human encounters.

Vayechi (Genesis 47:28-50:26)

וַיַּרְא יִשְׂרָאֵל, אֶת-בְּנֵי יוֹסֵף ; וַיֹּאמֶר, מִי-אֵלֶּה
וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף, אֶל-אָבִיו, בָּנַי הֵם, אֲשֶׁר-נָתַן-לִי אֱלֹהִים בָּזֶה ; וַיֹּאמַר, קָחֶם-נָא אֵלַי וַאֲבָרְכֵם
וְעֵינֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כָּבְדוּ מִזֹּקֶן, לֹא יוּכַל לִרְאוֹת ; וַיַּגֶּשׁ אֹתָם אֵלָיו, וַיִּשַּׁק לָהֶם וַיְחַבֵּק לָהֶם

When Israel saw Joseph's sons, he asked, "Who are these?" And Joseph said to his father, "They are my sons, whom God has given me here." He [Jacob] said, "Bring them to me, pray, that I may bless them." Israel's eyes had grown clouded with age; he could no longer see. Joseph brought them over to him, whereupon he kissed and hugged them. (Genesis 48:8-10)

Overview: This final section of the Joseph cycle of stories, and this final *parashah* of the Book of Genesis, begins seventeen years after Jacob's arrival in Egypt, when he was 147 years old. Jacob is close to death, so he summons Joseph to his bedside and has him pledge solemnly that he will not bury him in Egypt. He wants to be interred at the family burial place at the Cave of Machpelah, in Hebron. As Jacob's condition worsens, Joseph brings his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh to see his father. Jacob blesses Joseph's two boys, effectively adopting them as his own sons and giving their future descendents the status of tribes. To receive the blessing, Joseph positions his older son Manasseh at Jacob's right hand, the hand of preference, and the younger son Ephraim at Jacob's left. But, following the trend of his own life where he, the younger brother, usurped the blessing of his older brother, Jacob reverses his hands so that the younger brother receives the blessing of the older. The boys are blessed together with the words that are used to this day by parents to bless a son (48:20).

Jacob then calls all his sons to his deathbed and gives them his final words, an "ethical will" of sorts that is a blend of assessment, prophecy, warning, prayer and blessing. Jacob then reiterates to all the sons that he is to be buried in Canaan, at Machpelah, next to Leah. Having said all he has to say, Jacob then dies, is embalmed and then mourned in Egypt for seventy days. With Pharaoh's approval, Jacob is taken by his family to be buried in the Land of Israel. With Jacob gone, the brothers become concerned that Joseph might now take revenge against them for having sold him into slavery. The brothers throw themselves on Joseph's mercy. In tears, Joseph assures them that he bears no grudge against them. He reminds them that God has brought them all to Egypt for a reason. The *parashah* concludes with Joseph's death at the age of 110. He is embalmed and

Vayechi (Genesis 47:28-50:26)

buried in Egypt. But, prior to his death, Joseph also asks to have his bones taken up to Israel when the Israelite nation eventually leaves Egypt.

Commentary:
Why is this portion *satum* ["closed"]? The death of Jacob caused a closing of the eyes and hearts of Israel, due to the troubles of the oppression which began (at this time). Alternatively: (Jacob) wished to reveal the end of days to his children, but it was closed to him. -Rashi 47:28, based on *Breishit Rabbah* 96:1

QUESTIONS:

1. NOTICE HOW RASHI MAKES A CONNECTION BETWEEN EYES, HEARTS, AND OPPRESSION. HOW DOES PAIN AND SUFFERING AFFECT THE WAY WE SEE EACH OTHER AND FACE THE WORLD?
2. ALTHOUGH THE TEXT SUGGESTS THAT JACOB FINALLY OPENS UP HIS HEART AND EYES TO SEE AND PERCEIVE THE BLESSINGS AROUND HIM (AS HE HUGS AND KISSES HIS GRANDCHILDREN), RASHI'S COMMENTS SUGGEST THAT SOMETHING STILL REMAINS CLOSED UP WITHIN JACOB. WHAT MIGHT THAT BE?
3. JACOB'S DEATH AT THE END OF GENESIS REPRESENTS THE END OF AN ERA, BOTH LITERALLY AND IDEOLOGICALLY. WITH HIS DEMISE, THE PATRIARCHAL AGE COMES TO A CLOSE AND A NEW GENERATION WILL BEGIN. RASHI'S COMMENTS ESTABLISH THIS TORAH PORTION AS NOT ONLY THE CLOSE OF A BOOK, BUT A CLOSED BOOK. IF OUR LIVES ARE FOREVER CHANGING, CAN ANY EXPERIENCE EVERY TRULY BE CLOSED OFF FROM US? WHY OR WHY NOT?

D'var Torah:
Think how much of life we miss when we cannot really see! Though our eyes may function quite well, our hearts and minds may impede their ability to find blessing in what is before them. This is precisely what happens to our patriarch Jacob.

This parashah, *Vayechi*, completes the cycle of sightlessness that plagues Jacob throughout his life. As he approaches death, Jacob comes to see clearly the blessings that have been bestowed upon him. *Vayechi* forces us to consider: What does it mean to see? When we look with our eyes at another person, do we see the person as he or she really is? Or do we merely observe a reflection of our own emotional connections or disconnect with that person?

In this *parashah*, our patriarch Jacob finally discovers that the secret to seeing others as they are can be found in his own heart and soul. When Jacob learns how to let go of his own pain and accept others for whom they truly are, he gains a deeper connection with his grandchildren and begins to perceive them as individuals.

Vayechi (Genesis 47:28-50:26)

Such a discovery is not innate for our patriarch Jacob. He is surrounded by people who lack the ability to see clearly. For example, consider this passage about Isaac:

When Isaac had grown old and his eyesight had dimmed, he called his elder son Esau, saying to him, "My son!" "Here I am," he answered. (Genesis 27:1)

We are taught that the eyesight of Jacob's father Isaac had dimmed. Isaac fails to recognize the destructive sibling rivalry raging between his twin sons, Esau and Jacob. Birthrights are traded away; blessings are stolen. Few commentators interpret this "dimmed" eyesight literally to mean that Isaac had less than twenty-twenty vision. Rather, the prevailing opinion is that Isaac, having survived the emotional horror of witnessing his father Abraham's attempt to kill him on the mountaintop, loses the ability to see—to understand—the complex nature of human interactions. From Isaac we learn that when the mind and heart are hijacked by emotional turmoil, the eyes cannot see the world or other people as they truly are.

Consider this passage about Leah:

Now Laban had two daughters; the elder was named Leah, and the younger was named Rachel. Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful of form and of face. (Genesis 29:16–17)

We are taught that Jacob's wife Leah has eyes that are weak. URJ's "Family Shabbat Table Talk" on *Vayeitzei* (5765) offers a variety of explanations for the term "weak," as follows:

Netziv claims that *rakot* [weak eyes] means that Leah's eyes were sensitive and that she was unable to shepherd flocks due to the pain the sun caused her eyes. Rashi explains that because the circumstances of her marriage (Jacob's true love for Rachel and Laban's trickery) were painful to her, Leah was easily moved to tears.

Moreover, as Ellen Frankel teaches us in *The Five Books of Miriam*, the focus on Leah's weak eyes may say more about Jacob's character than it does about Leah's:

Since Jacob's deception of his brother takes advantage of Isaac's blindness, his punishment fittingly revolves around eyes. Leah adds: . . . "Although Jacob preferred beautiful Rachel and worked seven years to win her, it was me he married first—or rather my eyes, which were the only part of me he saw over my veil. In fact, it was his eyes that proved weak, so that he, like his father Isaac, chose the wrong sibling." (Ellen Frankel, The *Five Books of Miriam* [New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1996], p. 51)

Because Leah's face is covered with a veil at her wedding, we imagine that the only parts of her that Jacob can see are her eyes. Although eyes are the

Vayechi (Genesis 47:28-50:26)

window into the soul, Jacob's could look neither inward into his own heart nor outward to differentiate between the eyes (and soul) of his beloved Rachel and of his first wife Leah. From the marriage of Jacob and Leah we learn that when the heart is heavy, the eyes cannot see clearly.

In this *parashah* we are taught that Jacob's eyes, too, were *kavdu mizoken*, "clouded" or "heavy with age" (Genesis 48:10). Having endured the turmoil of his life—fleeing from his dysfunctional family, running from his enraged brother, being tricked initially out of marrying his beloved Rachel, failing to see the turmoil raging amongst his sons, enduring the apparent death of his beloved son Joseph—Jacob lacks more than twenty-twenty eyesight. Throughout his life, he is unable to open up his heart enough to see the beauty before his eyes.

That is, he is unable to do so until this week's *parashah*—until he finally realizes at the end of his life that he must transcend his suffering and embrace those he wants to love with fullness and openness. So he wraps his arms around his grandchildren Manasseh and Ephraim, and calls them his own. He offers them blessings because he recognizes—he finally sees—that *they* are his part of *his* blessing. Soon thereafter, he blesses all of his children, offering them wisdom based on his new "insight" (the "sight" he finds "inside" himself).

How sad it is that Jacob has to wait until the end of his days to see the blessings and beauty that surround him! To help us move from such blindness, our Jewish holy days encourage us to see what really is and what really can be. We learn from Chanukah that in the midst of darkness we can increase the brightness in our lives and in our world, allowing us to see more clearly. We learn from Pesach that in the midst of hopelessness we can envision a better tomorrow and move forward into a brighter future. And we learn from Yom Kippur that when we step back from those sensations that confuse or control us, we can gain insight ("sight inside" ourselves) to glimpse the truth that resides within.

Will you learn to see life as it truly is? Will you find a way to envision the blessings that are and can be yours? Will you be the type of leader who shares that with your followers? May you—differently from Jacob—find that insight earlier—now—so that you can lead yourself and others to blessing.

Conclusion

Finding your voice is critical if you are to be an authentic leader. If you do not, you may find yourself with a vocabulary that belongs to someone else, mouthing words that were written by a speech writer who is nothing like you at all. Every artist knows that finding a voice is most definitely not a matter of technique. It is a matter of time and a matter of searching – soul searching. Once again, I will quote Kouzes, who tells a story about a painter, "There are really three periods in an artist's life. In the first, we paint exterior landscapes. In the second, we paint interior landscapes. In the third they come together into an artist's unique style. In the third period, we paint ourselves."[124] I consider this a very important lesson that applies just as well to the appreciation of the art of leadership.

When first learning to lead, we paint what we see outside ourselves, the exterior landscape. We read biographies and autobiographies of famous leaders, we read books by executives and scholars, we attend speeches by motivational speakers, and participate in training programs. We learn from others. We try things out.

We do all this to master the fundamentals, the tools, and the technique. We might be clumsy at first, failing more than succeeding, but pretty soon we can give a speech with ease, conduct a meeting with grace, and praise someone with style. It is an essential period – an aspiring leader can no more skip the fundamentals than can an aspiring painter.

Then it happens. Somewhere along the way we notice how that last meeting was a boring routine, and how that last encounter felt terribly sad and empty. We awaken to the

[124] J.M. Kouzes and B.Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge,* 4th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 4.

frightening thought that the words are not ours and that the technique is out of a book, not straight from the heart.

This is a truly terrifying moment. We have invested so much time and energy in learning to do all the right things, and we suddenly see that they are no longer serving us well. They seem hollow. We stare into the darkness of our inner territory, and we begin to wonder what lies inside.

For aspiring leaders, this awakening initiates a period of intense exploration and study, a period of going beyond taking advice from others. And if you surrender to it, after exhausting experimentation and often painful suffering there emerges from all those abstract strokes on the canvas an expression of self that is truly your own. Jewish leaders are nurtured and developed by this authentic learning experience rooted in studying pure and in-depth texts from our rich canon.

Yes, you can learn to lead, but don't confuse leadership with position or place. The foundation of leadership is skills and systems, tools and techniques, but they are not what earn you the respect and commitment of your followers. What earns you their respect in the end is whether you are you. Only through study are you able to discover your authentic voice. This learning fosters personal growth and eventually empowers you to impact your community and the face of Judaism today and in the future. I hope this project has been helpful in that journey of finding out just who you are.

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