

## **Moshe and Aharon: Leadership through Humility**

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*In Memory of Mel Hecht, Past President of Jewish Center of Teaneck  
Faithful Steward of our Congregation, who Led with Humility*

In Parashat Beha'alotcha, things fall apart. The dream which had beckoned the Jewish people, which they consistently moved closer to throughout their year and a month in the desert, begins to fray. And the people turn, of course, on their leaders. Ironically, however, it is in this very Torah portion that one senses the full greatness of the leaders of the Jewish people, Moshe and Aharon.

As the Sages teach us, these brothers' true greatness lay in their humility, their absolute refusal to engage in self-promotion and self-aggrandizement, a trait which each brother manifested in his own way.

This week's *sedra* begins with a brief description of Aharon's lighting of the menorah, with a clear emphasis on his punctilious adherence to the lighting instructions he received from Moshe. Chazal observe that it could not have been easy for Aharon to perpetually be on the receiving end of directions from his younger brother. Nonetheless, Aharon steadfastly performed the hallowed service of kindling the Temple flame, secure in the knowledge that he was carrying out the will of the Lord.

From the very moment that the mantle of leadership had been passed from Aharon to Moshe, despite the latter's having gone into exile in Midian, Aharon's response was one of true happiness for his brother, **ושמח בלבו**. His happiness was pure, and deep, and completely authentic; it was a joy of the heart. If Kayin raged when his younger brother, and his offering, were favored, and eventually murdered his own brother; if Esav despised and plotted the death of Yaakov; and if the brothers did the very same to Yosef, Aharon was completely different. It was never about him.

As far as Moshe himself is concerned, the Torah tells us that no man who ever walked the face of the Earth embodied the trait of humility than Moshe Rabbenu, and perhaps, never more clearly than in an incident recorded in our Torah portion. When two individuals from the camp begin to engage in prophecy, Moshe's closest aide instinctively senses the position of his mentor

being usurped, and offers to incarcerate the rogue prophets. Moshe, characteristically, has the diametrically opposite response. Would that it were, Moshe plaintively sighs, that all of the Jewish people were themselves prophets of the Lord. In a heartbeat, Moshe would choose the spiritual advancement of his fellow Jews over maintaining his own indispensable role as Hashem's liaison with his Nation.

Moshe and Aharon define not only the proper ethos of Jewish leadership, but the broader Jewish attitude towards honor and prestige as well. Aharon's personality stands as a timeless testament against a perspective which conflates stature with the power to tell other people what to do, and not have to listen to anyone else. Moshe's heartfelt desire for all Jews to be able to experience the spiritual levels which he had achieved is a direct rebuke to an attitude that measures self-worth as a function of the idolization of others. Together, these brothers remind us that the ultimate source of all honor and glory is not in control or power, nor in the fawning admiration of multitudes, but in humble service of the Lord.