

The Passing of the Torch

Beha'alotcha 5779
Installation Shabbat

As some in this room undoubtedly remember, on a cold January morning some fifty eight and one half years ago, wearing neither jacket nor hat, the youngest man to ever assume the oath of the office of the President of the United States, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, addressed the American people.

The new President declared, at what he described as a “celebration of freedom”, that the torch had been “passed to a new generation of Americans, born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage.”

Much the same is true for us today.

We find ourselves in not only the oldest synagogue in Teaneck, but the oldest Jewish institution of any kind in this town, and one of the very first in this state.

We find ourselves surrounded by the names of those who came before us, and we, too, are deeply proud of *our* heritage, those who envisioned this institution, and built her, and sustained her.

We find ourselves in the presence of individuals who have invested decades- half a century or more in some cases- to the well being of this institution, and who continue to do so, with a devotion and sense of commitment which commands my respect every single day, as well as our collective gratitude. And, we feel blessed that those who have stood the watch will continue to do so.

And yet, today, with a sense of reverence for the past, and, in equal measure, a sense of anticipation for the future, *we find ourselves* engaged in a moment of great magnitude for our community, as we pass the torch to a new generation of leaders, to our new trustees, Rebecca Richmond, Daniel Wetrin, Shmuel Elhaded, and above all, to our new President, Uri Horowitz.

Uri, you will be supported by the collected wisdom and experience of our Vice President Ben Cooper, and of course, Allen and Daniel as well, and our returning trustees, Eva, Effie, Steve, and of course, by Bob Rabkin, who instantly recognized your unique skills and talents, and saw in you the qualities of leadership.

As we spoke about last week in the context of Jacqui's wedding, Bob has been a lion for this synagogue, and he stands squarely in the pantheon of the greatest lay leaders this august institution has ever known, and into whose large footprints Uri now steps.

In introducing Uri, allow me to offer the same words which Moshe offered the leaders of the Jewish people, the seventy elders who are selected in this week's parshah, אֲשֶׁרֵיכֶם שָׁנַתְמַנִּיתֶם פְּרֹנְסִים עַל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. "שֶׁל מְקוֹם." 'Praised are you, for you have been selected to be responsible for the Jewish people.'

Uri, we all recognize this virtue in you- your capacity to serve as a *parnas*, which comes from the word, as you well know, לַפְּרֹנֵס, to provide.

You have a refined and acute sense of duty and responsibility, to provide- for your family- and now, for a community that looks to you, your steady hand, your even temper, your probing insight.

You have, to return to President Kennedy's words that day, never asked what someone else may do for you, but rather, have always sought to provide, to serve, to identify that which you might do for others.

And yet, none of that alone would have sufficed to entrust you with this most significant responsibility.

As this week's parshah concludes regarding the character of Moshe, וְהָאִישׁ מֹשֶׁה עֲנוּ מֵאֵד מְאֹד מִכָּל הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר עַל פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה, Moshe was exceedingly humble. Rambam understands this to be not merely a biographical description unique to Moshe, but a general mandate of

leadership, אָסוּר לְאָדָם לְנַהֵג בְּשִׁרְרָה עַל הַצְּבוּר וּבְגִסוּת הָרוּחַ אֶלָּא, בְּעֲנֻוָּה וְיִרְאָה, a person must lead, not from arrogance, not from a lust for power, but with a sense of reverence and humility.

And, this, above all, defines you Uri. Self-effacing, reverential, and deeply modest.

Beneath each self-deprecating comment at your own expense, there is a deep and authentic sense of reverence for everything that this sacred house represents, everything that it strives to be, and an abiding sense of modesty regarding your personal contributions to her welfare, even if we know that they are far greater than you care to articulate. This too, is well and good, for we know, לֹא הַמְדַרֵּשׁ הָעֵיקָר אֵלָּא הַמַּעֲשֵׂה, it will be your actions which speaks for themselves.

For these reasons, Uri, we place much trust and faith in you.

As President Kennedy concluded that day, even as we ask the Almighty's blessing and His help for you, and for our entire congregation, we know, that, here, on this earth, God's work must truly be our own.

Friends, it is my high honor and great pleasure to introduce a man whom I greatly respect, President of the Jewish Center, Uri Horowitz.

