



Pinchas

Numbers 25:10 – 30:1

Every week, on Shabbat in the synagogue, we pray that God provides our leaders with wisdom and the guidance they need to make the right decisions.

The Lord said to Moses, Go up into this mountain of Abarim and see the land that I have given to the people of Israel. (Numbers 27:12)

So begins a moving dialogue between God and Moses towards the end of Moses' life. Everything that happens in the remaining chapters of Numbers and all of Deuteronomy actually takes place in the last year of the Israelites' stay in the desert, just prior to their entry into the Land of Israel. And, with this verse, God instructs Moses as to the last days of his own life. Like Aaron, God will guide Moses up a mountain and there he will die. But, prior to his death, Moses will be able to see the entire Land of Israel spread before him, a land that he yearns to enter but God prevents him from doing so.

The actual occurrence of this event is recorded in Deuteronomy chapter 34. Moses ascends Mt. Nebo, on the Abarim, and is able to see, miraculously, the entire Land of Israel.

But what is most interesting in this section of Numbers is not God's instruction to Moses, but Moses' response to God. He does not argue with God nor plea for his life. Instead, his first concern is the continued leadership of the Children of Israel. With this reaction, Moses proves to be the quintessential leader, a man whose very being is intrinsically connected with his concern and sense of responsibility for the nation, above and beyond his own selfish concerns for his life and death.

Moses asks God to appoint a man “*who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in*”, a shepherd for the flock that is the Children of Israel.” (Numbers 27:16-17) And God instructs Moses to appoint Joshua to this job.

Note that it is not God who appoints Joshua, but Moses who does so, in accordance with God's command. For Moses is, first and foremost a man, and his concern is for a man who will lead the nation. God clearly remains in charge and it is the function of the leader to heed God's will in leading the nation. In fact, Moses' charge to Joshua is: “*Be strong and courageous...It is the Lord who goes before you, He will be with you, he will not leave you or forsake you.*” But it is Moses who encourages Joshua and who charges him with his mission: “*You shall go with this people into the land that the Lord has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall put them in possession of it.*” (Deuteronomy 31:7-8)

It is amazing how God is often used as a crutch by people who try to evade responsibility. We can sit back and let things run their own course, they will often say, for God is in charge. But Moses did not see things that way, and neither did God. Real, human leadership was needed for the Children of Israel and Joshua was going to have to lead his people into battle. Did that mean that God was not part of the plan? Of course not. But man needed to take responsibility, and the leaders needed to be responsible for the people and for guiding the people in the way that God intended.

Moses wanted to make sure that a worthy leader was appointed to replace him before he died. And that leader, Joshua, was the man who actually brought the Children of Israel into the Land of Israel. Our current leaders are no Moses and Joshua. But every week, on Shabbat in the synagogue, we pray to God to provide our leaders with wisdom and the guidance they need to make the right decisions. That our leaders may have the wisdom and the faith that Joshua had, to do what is right for the Nation of Israel and assist us in settling the Land of Israel, as God has commanded.