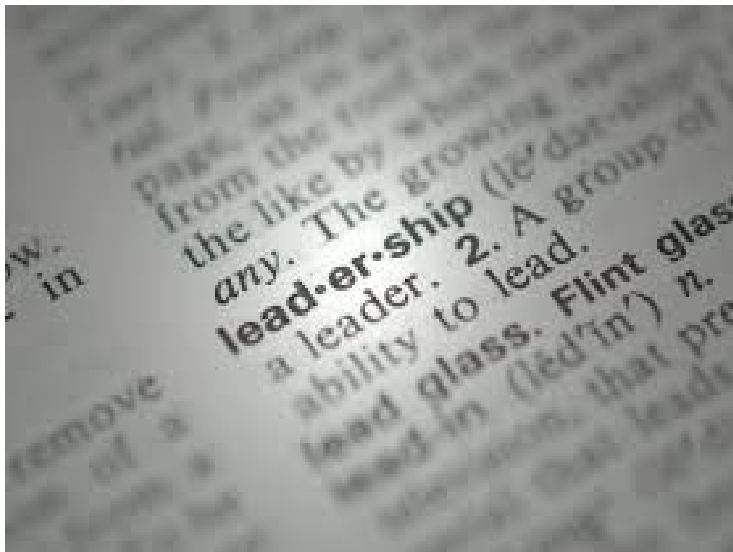


Shemot

January 21, 2017

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה, אֶל-הָאֱלֹהִים, מִי אֲנֹכִי, כִּי אֵלֶךְ אֶל-פַּרְעֹה; וְכִי אֹצִיא אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרָיִם

Exodus 3:11 *Moses said to G-d: 'Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should lead the children of Israel out of Egypt?'*



This week we read the first portion in the book of Exodus. Setting the stage, the opening verses describe how Jacob's progeny grew among the people of Egypt. Considering them a threat to the existing tribes, the Pharaoh enslaves the growing Israelite nation. Moses is introduced as the leader called by G-d to liberate his subjugated people. G-d speaks to Moses from a burning bush saying, "I am the G-d of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the G-d of Isaac, the G-d of Jacob." In response, the text explains, "Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at G-d." (Exodus 3:6) Moses' transformation throughout the rest of the Torah is remarkable. In the final verses of the Torah, we read "And there never again was a prophet in Israel like Moses who

knew the Eternal face to face." (Deuteronomy 34:10). Moses grew from a reluctant and frightened shepherd who hid his face in fear to an incomparable leader of the Israelite people with a personal relationship with G-d.

In an [article](#) comparing the leadership of Barack Obama to George W. Bush vis à vis their Middle East policies, journalist David Brooks asserts that history, like the Bible, is full of reluctant leaders. Brooks states that the "defining characteristic of a reluctant leader is that he [sic] is self-divided. He feels compelled to do things he'd rather not do. This self-division can come in negative and positive forms."

Certain leaders elected to govern the State of Israel have also been "self-divided". Whether circumventing existing laws for the greater good or acting against the wishes of their constituents, Israel's statesmen have stood in the midst of turmoil, making decisions that arise out of a measure of self-division and internal conflict.

Israel's founder and first Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion moved ahead to establish the Jewish state in a climate that was likely to result in attacks from Arab armies on all borders. It was also at a time when the emblem of democracy and freedom, the United States, firmly rejected the proclamation of Israel. The United Nations was in discussions about placing the country under international trusteeship. And fellow leaders, including Moshe Sharett and Nachum Goldman, had suggested postponing the declaration to a more opportune moment. No doubt torn by a sense of urgency and a sense of prudence, Ben-Gurion chose

to move boldly forward and declared independent statehood for the land of Israel. During his second term as Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion supported the establishment of relations with West Germany even though he encountered vehement opposition, primarily from his chief political rival Menachem Begin.

Golda Meir served as Israel's Prime Minister from 1969 to 1973. Historians often criticize Meir's lack of focus and progress on both women's advancement and improving economic and social integration for [Mizrahi Jews](#). She chose not to use the prerogatives of her office to advance or promote women in the public or domestic sphere. The [Jewish Women's Archive](#), on their website of famous Jewish women states, "That a notable female can be simultaneously an inspiration and a disappointment, a source of great pride and of deep frustration, is the unique contribution of the queen bee..." Making choices about her area of focus, Meir certainly realized that she disappointed some while satisfying others.

Ariel Sharon is yet another Israeli statesman who personified a "self-divided" leader. He is considered to be among Israel's most charismatic politicians. The son of Russian immigrants, he joined the Zionist movement in his young teens and when he turned 14, signed up for the [Hagana](#) (the precursor to the IDF charged with guarding Jewish settlements in pre-State Palestine). Sharon grew from a famous military leader to a conservative pro-settlement politician. During the administration of Prime Minister Menachem Begin, Sharon launched a program to create Jewish settlements throughout the Occupied Territories. Over two decades, from 1970 to 1990, he aided in the construction of more than 200 settlements, dozens of which were in the Gaza Strip. Recognizing his impressive military record, Begin appointed Sharon to Minister of Defense in 1981. During Sharon's tenure, scores of Ethiopian Jews were resettled in Israel. Sharon launched a very controversial attack on Lebanon in an attempt to drive out PLO leader Yasser Arafat. Sharon confounded and angered many of his supporters by ordering Israel's [disengagement from Gaza](#), which included the removal of all Israeli settlers and troops from Gaza, during his term in office in 2004-2005. Sharon had come to realize that continuing to rule the area was no longer in the state's best interest. He revised his past expansionist approach that allowed for Jews to settle in all of historic Palestine for what he felt was best for the future of modern Israel.

The self-divided leader tends to reflect on his or her decisions in a way that a leader who is certain does not. And in this introspection, he or she may at times choose a direction that differs from that which he or she would typically take. While we might expect great and accomplished national figures to lead with conviction and assuredness, the Torah and subsequent generations of Israeli leaders teach that one who is self-divided, and perhaps even reluctant, can also achieve great success as a leader.

Discussion Questions:

Do all leaders have a measure of reluctance? Should they? Why or why not? How might reluctance serve to help make a leader stronger? Do leaders with a philosophical or ideological approach early in life, change that approach as they grow in their political careers?

Can you think of additional Israeli leaders who were self-divided? Discuss the career of Yitzhak Rabin, who disliked having to negotiate with Arafat's PLO but understood it was better for Israel engage in diplomacy with a secular arm of the Palestinian people at the Oslo Accords, than try to engage Hamas, a theologically-based form of Palestinian nationalism.

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