

Pinchas 2017

Delivered by Rabbi Aaron Krupnick 7/15/17

As you likely remember, the Torah starts in the beginning of Genesis with the creation of the world, and it ends with the last verses of Deuteronomy telling of the death of Moses. And yet, somewhat surprisingly, it is here in the Book of Numbers that Moses comes face to face with his own mortality. (There will be forty more chapters between this week's section and the end of Deuteronomy when Moses actually passes.) It is a powerful, poignant, and in a way perplexing scene: "The Lord said to Moses, 'Go up the Avarim Mountains and look out over the land that I am giving to the Israelites. After you have seen it, you will die, as your brother Aaron did, because both of you rebelled against my command in the wilderness of Zin. When the whole community complained against me at Merivah, you refused to acknowledge my holy power before them.'" Moses prayed, "Lord, God, source of all life, appoint, I pray, a man who can lead the people and can command them in battle, so that your community will not be like sheep without a shepherd." The Lord said to Moses, "Take Joshua son of Nun, a capable man, and place your hands on his head. Have him stand in front of El-azar the priest and the whole community, and there before them all proclaim him as your successor. Give him some of your own authority, so that the whole community of Israel will obey him."

That Moshe is confronted with his own mortality at this point in the narrative, and not at the end of Deuteronomy, is not really all that surprising. In fairly short order he has seen both his sister, Miriam and his brother, Aaron pass away. Furthermore, he has just discussed how the daughters of Tzelophchad would inherit from their father. What IS surprising, however, is that Moshe asks Gd to pick his successor. Kingship passes from father to son. So does the position of Kohen Gadol. The priesthood went from Aaron to his son Elazar, and then on to Elazar's son, Pinchas for whom this parsha is named. Religious leadership passed from parent to child. The daughters of Tzelophchad inherit from their father, too. So why doesn't Moshe assume that his own child would inherit the mantle of leadership from him?

You can almost hear the people with Moshe in the desert gossiping about it: "Poor Moshe. No nachas from his kids! Look at Aaron - he has a son he can be proud of - a son who can inherit him." Elazar, Aaron's son, was even involved in the process of picking the successor for Moshe, clearly bypassing Moshe's own children, Gershom and Eliezer. Really we don't need to speculate as to what that gossip sounded like, the Midrash fills it in. There are rabbinic interpretations that say that the reason Moshe's kids did not inherit was because Moshe neglected to give them a good spiritual education. According to one Midrash, Moses himself was so preoccupied with leading the people that he simply did not have time to attend to the spiritual needs of his own kids. So, for instance, the Torah tells us that when Jethro came to visit his son-in-law after the division of the Red Sea, he brought with him Moses' wife Tziporah and their two sons. They had not been with him until then! We know Moshe found his job overwhelming - it's a theme that runs throughout the Torah. So the gossipers would say something that every father or mother loathes to hear today - "He simply did not have the right work/life balance." NO working parent, male or female, ever wants to hear that said about them!

But that's all it is - gossip. I'll give you two good reasons why Moshe did not expect his kids to inherit his job. The first is that he knew that this kind of leadership needed to be earned. No one would strive to reach the highest levels of leadership if they knew they could not attain them

without the right last name. And the second reason is far simpler: Moshe knew that they weren't qualified. They weren't slow, or lazy, or bad; they just did not have the leadership skills that were needed and Moshe knew that it would take a very special person to carry on in his stead, not simply a person who he happened to father. It wasn't that Moshe loved his kids less, or was not there for them when they were growing up. It's just that he knew them for who they were and accepted them for who they were. They were better suited for other things, and by allowing them to be whom they were, and not who he needed them to be, he was being a good parent and a great leader.

When I was a kid growing up, there was one book on parenting: Dr. Spock. Now there is an entire wall of Barnes and Noble filled with "How to Parent" books. In fact, there are so many books that it is overwhelming. You are tempted to think that if you don't read the right books your kids will grow up the wrong way. And part of that comes from the insecurity that working parents feel because we want to be able to spend more time with our kids and we want all the time they are together to be "quality time." So parents wonder, "*What should we do maximize the time we have with our kids?*" But, I think that's the wrong question to ask for it clearly has no right answer. Instead, I think parents should be asking themselves, "***What wisdom do I have to impart to my children, and how can I model it for them?***" That's a question we can all answer because wisdom does not come from a book, it is learned in the school of life, and it is taught there as well.

I believe that our responsibility as parents is not to create mini versions of ourselves. Moses taught us that. Our responsibility is to model good, productive lives of meaning that our kids can learn from. Then they take it from there. Some may disappoint us because they do not turn out the way that we had hoped. Sometimes they make bad choices and they, themselves, must live with the consequences, but most of the time they turn out just fine. We need to empower our kids to be the people they need to be, not the people we, or others, expect them to be. We open doors for them, but ultimately, they choose which ones to walk through and which paths to follow.

You know, "parenting" only became a verb in the 1970's. It was then that it became an active process, a skill honed over time. And we can all grow through parenting and grand parenting, but the fundamental measure of success are not our children's achievement, but rather our ability to share with them what is good in us. Let them learn to be who they need to be by watching us answer that same question each and every day.