

D'var Rav: Words from the Rabbi

A CALL TO LEAD, A CALL TO ACT

During the Days of Awe, I advocated, as a theme for this year, that we in The New Shul community focus our energy on opening our hearts. I explored the relationship between empathy and action. And I challenged us, as a way of doing battle with the forces of injustice around us, to create a culture of compassion, commitment, and initiative.

Yet for all this to happen, we need leadership—*moral* leadership, the kind exemplified by our prophets, sages, and mystics. This sort of leadership is not about the pursuit of power, but the striving for a sound and just world.

The Jewish tradition offers us several instructive models of moral leadership, though each one, like each one of us, is imperfect and flawed.

There is Moses, the visionary, inspirational leader who, with God as the ultimate guide, led our ancestors out of Egyptian bondage. But Moses was also a controlling and isolated figure, impatient with his people and prone to eruptions of anger.

There is Aaron, high priest and populist peacemaker. More beloved among the masses than Moses, he commanded less authority, and some of his attempts to accommodate and compromise often undermined his own ethical standing.

And there is the mystical model of *tzimtzum*, of exercising restraint and knowing when it is time to step back in order to make room for others to step forward. Yet the leader who adopts this approach can risk appearing distant and detached.

While no single model is perfect, our community needs different kinds of leaders who embody *all* of them if it is to progress in the ways we want it to. Some of us need to come out of the shadows and step up. Some of us need to let go and allow for the emergence of others. And some of us need to return from our “hiatus” with renewed energy, dedication, and generosity.

Many of you *have* led through your actions, and, as your rabbi, it is a beautiful thing to behold. But let’s not lose the momentum. We need more from everyone, in every area of our sacred work—education, social justice, growth, fiscal stability.

We need a community of leaders, of *activists*. We need to become, as the Torah urges us to be, a holy people, a kingdom of priests.

Let us all heed that call to serve and to lead.

B’shalom, Niles