



ארגון רבני צהר



הסתדרות הציננית העולמית
המערך לשירותים רוחניים בתפוצות

BSD

Parashat Ha'azinu

With Great Expectations Come Great Disappointments

-Rabbi Yuval Sherlo-

The issue of failed leadership has accompanied mankind throughout history. At its core is a great dilemma. On the one hand, if a leader fails and transgresses the decree of the appointing authority, the leader must be relieved of his or her duties, and if the transgression was intentional the leader may also be brought to trial for the offense. On the other hand, such treatment of leaders may deter people from seeking positions of leadership. If leadership is a faculty that is not forgiving of mistakes, then those people who ultimately do achieve positions of leadership will be reticent to admit their mistakes, which by extension will result in the failure to remedy such mistakes and to create a process for preventing reoccurrences of such mistakes in the future.

This issue, which has come up multiple times in Israeli society during the past year with regard to, among other things, officers in the Israel Police who failed to protect marchers in the Gay Pride Parade and governmental leaders who made poor decisions following the findings of various inquiry committees, has produced a public discourse via which the truth that lies with each party can come to light, so that no one party may claim that the other side is completely lacking in merit.

At the end of our parasha, the Torah deals with this very dilemma, but resolves it unequivocally in favor of one side:

"And Hashem spoke to Moshe on that very day, saying: 'Go up this Mount Avarim [to] Mount Nevo, which is in the land of Moav, that is facing Jericho, and see the Land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel as a possession, and die on the mountain upon which you are climbing and be gathered to your people, just as your brother Aharon died on Mount Hor and was gathered to his people. Because you betrayed Me in the midst of the children of Israel at the waters of Merivath Kadesh, [in] the desert of Zin, [and] because you did not sanctify Me in the midst of the children of Israel. For from afar you will see the land, but you will not come there, to the land I am giving to the children of Israel."

Moshe, the revered leader, who took the children of Israel out of Egypt, who merited receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai and who stood at the front of the nation throughout its travels in the desert, did not merit entering the Land of Israel because of a particular failure under specific circumstances. In this respect, this failure caused all of Moshe's other accomplishments to be negated. Moreover, all of Moshe's prayers to Hashem (related at the beginning of parashat Va'etchanan), beseeching Him for permission to enter the Land, were refused and Moshe ultimately passed away outside of the Land of Israel.

This resolution of our dilemma by the Torah obviously has the potential to play out with regard to a wide variety of issues, but it most certainly demonstrates a clear course: it is a great virtue to be a leader, and a leader merits certain protective measures ("and you shall not curse a prince of your nation") and many rights. However, the height of the leader's position brings with it commensurate obligations, and if such obligations are not met the Torah, at least in this case, dictates that the leader must pay the price and not realize all of his dreams and desires.

Rabbi Yuval Sherlo is the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Amit Orot Shaul in Kefar Batya and a member of the executive board of Tzohar