



5780 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Pinchas / פרשת פינחס

Leadership: Yerushalayim Style

When Moshe asks God to appoint his successor he describes the ideal Jewish leader:¹ “Let the Lord, the God of spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation, who will go forth before them and come before them, who will lead them out and bring them in.” Rashi interprets the phrase “go forth before them” to refer to displaying leadership through personal example in times of war. The leader must lead his people in battle and not stay at home.

The Sefer Ma’ayanah shel Torah offers an additional interpretation. Some leaders are always looking at the people to see what is popular and then only formulate a plan or implement a policy after knowing that the people will accept it. This, however, is not the Torah’s approach. The leader must take personal responsibility and “go forth **before** them,” leading based on what God wants as opposed to what is popular. Through his piety, charisma and leadership skills the leader must make sure that the people will eventually follow, but there is no guarantee that his decisions will initially align with the people’s will.

Rav Yisrael Salanter suggests that leadership without a backbone will characterize the time period before Mashiach.² The Mishna says that in that time “the face of the generation will be like the face of a dog.”³ Rav Salanter noted that while a dog runs before its master, he is always looking back to check if his master is happy with him or not. Similarly, the deficient leaders in the time before Mashi’ach will always be looking over their shoulder to make sure that they do what is popular and not what is right.

It is for the reason that the Torah wants the political and judicial leadership of the Jewish people to be situated in Yerushalayim.

¹ Bamidbar 27:16-17.

² Cited in Ma’ayanah shel Torah.

³ Sotah 49b.

