

Bs”d

## Accountable and Transparent Leadership-

### A Torah Perspective

By: Rabbi M. Szmerling

There are a number of lessons in Torah regarding transparency and the avoidance of even a perception of a conflict of interests. These lessons can be derived from our first leader, *Moshe Rabbeinu*.

After Moshe requested contributions of valuables to be used in the construction of the Mishkan, (Tabernacle), there is a whole *parshah* in the Torah known as “*Pekudei*” which lists in great detail where all of the gold, silver and other donated materials were used.

This demonstrates the high standard of transparency which is expected of all Jewish leaders, according to the Torah. Whilst *Moshe Rabbeinu* led the services in the *Mishkan* before his brother Aharon was appointed as the Kohen Gadol, he wore a simple white garment, with no pockets and without even a hem. This was done in order that no one would even have a question about whether Moshe was hiding anything for himself.

In a number of incidents, Moshe decided to remove himself from judgement in cases in which he might have possibly had

a conflict of interests, or at least, his judgment may have become clouded or biased.

2.

The daughters of Tzelophad who are mentioned in this week's parshah, (Pinchas), demanded the right to a parcel of land in Israel. They approached Moshe and said to him,

“Our father was not involved in any rebellion against your leadership, neither in the rebellion of Korach, nor in the sin of the Spies.”

As soon as Moshe heard their claim that their father was not involved in any rebellion against him or his leadership, he decided that he did not want to have any part in these decisions. Moshe begged Hashem to take care of their claims.

Moshe would have no part in any action or words that would imply that he was showing personal favouritism towards his supporters.

The same is true in the converse. When a young Jewish man cursed Hashem, and Moshe realised that this young man's father was the Egyptian task-master whom Moshe had killed, Moshe refused to have any part in the judgement of the young man. He was put into a jail and Moshe waited until Hashem would judge this case.

We see from the above incidents that Moshe would always avoid being involved in any case where he felt that the people being judged could be perceived as being either “friends” or “enemies”.

3.

In the case of the man who collected wood on Shabbos, Moshe also refused to be involved in his judgment. He was placed in prison, and Moshe waited for Hashem to judge his case. This incident took place in the first weeks of the wandering of the Israelites, when Moshe was encouraging the observance of the laws of Shabbos, even before the Jews had formally received the Ten Commandments.

Were he to personally judge this case, it might look like Moshe was judging this person in a biased and unbalanced way, since he was at the same time trying to encourage his own “pet project” of Shabbat observance.

The humility that Moshe Rabbeinu demonstrated in the governance of the Jewish people is also a hallmark of the high standard of humble leadership shown by his brother Aharon who was the Kohen Gadol.

There is an obligation for the Kohen Gadol to bring cheap flour offerings every day. Many people would bring expensive sacrifices of animals, or more modest sacrifices of birds, but Aharon was entreated never to lose touch with the poorer individuals amongst the Jewish people. This ensured

that the poorer members of society would never be embarrassed, or feel less valued, because they contributed only what they could honestly afford.

4.

There is a letter from the Lubavitcher Rebbe, obm, which can also shed some light on these issues. (Kuntres Tzaddik I'Melech Vol. 7 pages 39-41)

There was a Jewish man in California, who seems to have been an admirer of Chabad. This man wrote to the Rebbe and asked him for his advice about opening up a business of some sort, which would generate income for Chabad activities in California, or, in one part of California.

In 5735/ 1975, the Rebbe wrote a letter back to him, and gave the following advice:

“...I wish to make some general observations, which are applicable to all places where there are Lubavitch activities. Even assuming that there was a surplus of manpower which could be put into such business activity, it would be incongruous if both spiritual activities and business activities were carried on by the same organization under the same roof. It would surely not enhance the inspiration and total devotion which one usually associates with the activities of Lubavitch for the spreading of Yiddishkeit.....

...If one is to have the fullest impact and influence in matters of spreading Yiddishkeit, one must be entirely free from any possible suspicion, however far-fetched, that one has some material gain in mind. Such suspicion would be difficult to avoid if Lubavitch activities were related also to some financial activities, even for the purpose of funding the

5.

spiritual activities which are so vital. This point becomes more weighty in view of the fact that Lubavitch devotes so much time and effort to involve also Jews whose life in the past has been devoid of spiritual and religious activity. It would be hard to approach such a Jew and tell him that we are concerned only about his soul and spiritual life, while conducting business on the side...”

There are many further examples of the above which could be quoted, but I will leave it here. The above-mentioned examples should suffice to convey the high standards of accountability and transparency which the Torah expects from people who are in positions of responsibility and leadership.

