

# JEWISH LEADERSHIP IN TIMES OF CRISIS: Duties and Dilemmas

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## I. Introduction

I thank the Chief Rabbi for his generous introduction. Whenever he introduces me or speaks of my writing, he exaggerates with such charm, such literary grace, and such persuasiveness that I must thank him for allowing me to draw inspiration from—myself...

But I sometimes do slip. ST: (KDH, "I didn't like the lamb last night." "Why, what did he talk about?")

I dedicate these remarks to the memory of my great, dear friend, the late Rabbi Lord Jakobovits ז"ל, with whom I had been friendly ever since he came to the Fifth Avenue Synagogue and I to The Jewish Center. With apologies to Keats, East was East and West was West, and we, in those good days, found East and West in beautiful harmony. The theme of leadership is appropriate to him because I considered him as preeminently a bold and vigorous leader. He told me that when his daughter was a little girl, he was teaching her the Shema, and then offered to translate it for her: Hear O Israel the Lord is our God the Lord is one. Whereupon the little girl turned pensive and after a few moments of deep reflection, she said, "Oh, in that case I'm older than God, because I'm three..." Lord Jakobovits was indeed singular and, in human terms of course, this Lord was one.

(at The Jewish Center: The theme of leadership has long intrigued me both because of its innate character and because I personally wrestle with its problems--often more than I care to. I have spoken and written about it in different forums several times, and I am certain that the subject is far from exhausted. I therefore offer these ruminations in honor of my distinguished colleague and dear friend, Rabbi J.J. Schacter, as he prepares to bid us farewell this coming month in order to accept as challenging leadership position in Boston.

I make no pretense to presenting a scientific study of the subject. I leave that to the professionals who have begun to treat leadership as a separate sub-specialty and have written large tomes about it. My remarks are subjective, and they issue from my own experience and mostly from what I think I have found in the traditional sources of Judaism. Hence, let me begin by stressing that I am talking about *Jewish* leadership, especially but not exclusively rabbinic leadership, and that my point of departure is the wisdom of the Jewish tradition. I therefore preface my remarks by one necessary comment on the distinguishing character of authentic Jewish leadership. Let me illustrate this from the life of Moses.)

There are two forms of leadership that must be distinguished from each other. Let me illustrate this from the life of Moses.

Moses is bogged down in his work as a judge as the people come to him, in his desert tent, to adjudicate their conflicts and answer their questions. Yitro, his pagan father-in-law, warns him, נבל תבל גם אתה גם העם הזה אשר עמך כי כבד ממך הדבר לא, "You will wear yourself and your people out; the task is too great, the burden too heavy for you to bear all by yourself." He tells Moses how to organize the judiciary effectively and systematically--appoint others, a hierarchy of judges, and you attend to the most difficult cases, a one-man supreme court. Moses accepts and implements the advice. Yet later (in בהעלותך), Moses complains to God--in almost the identical language that Yitro used--that it's not working: לא אוכל, "I cannot by myself carry this whole people, it is too heavy for me." And the divine advice is... to get 70 elders to help him: אספה לי שבעים איש. But was not that the very same kind of advice Yitro originally gave Moses?

The answer is: *No*. Yitro gave *management* advice, God--*leadership*. Yitro surely deserved an MBA from MIT or Harvard for counseling Moses on administrative procedure--but God's teaching was that of *spiritual* leadership--the seventy elders were to participate in Moses' moral mission: ואצלתי מן הרוח אשר עליך ושמת עליהם, "I will take from your spirit, your prophetic prowess, and place it upon them." You don't need just gophers or executives, Moses, you need men of the spirit.



Management is an important skill—but it does not possess the quality of **commitment** to *רוח*, to something beyond one's self or one's constituency. This is what characterizes genuinely Jewish, especially religious, leadership. Without that spiritual component, leadership cannot rightly be described as Jewish.

## II. Courage

That having been said, we may proceed to adumbrating <sup>the remaining</sup> three of the many salient features that ought to characterize the Jewish leadership so necessary for our community.

The first such characteristic is simple enough--yet enormously difficult to attain: **Courage**. I refer to the moral and psychic courage to walk by yourself, alone if need be amongst those who not only disagree but who deprecate and defame, and to defy public opinion and do what is politically incorrect, guided only by your commitment to what you consider the right and the true. At times, this implies the courage not only to defy your opponents, but to respectfully disagree with your friends. Someone once said of Abraham Lincoln that he would not be bullied even by his friends. Leadership, especially of our community in our times, and most especially in the presence of the media which so often prove pernicious in their desire to stir up confrontation, cannot be effective without a healthy diet of courage.

In one of the more arcane Kabbalistically inclined anthologies of midrashic interpretation, *ילקוט ראובני*, we read a strange comment on the popular verses which appears in *בהעלותך* and which we recite whenever we remove the Torah from the ark: *ויהי בנסוע הארון ויאמר משה* etc. In the Torah text, these two verses, 85 letters in all, are surrounded by two peculiar orthographic symbols: *נונין הפוכין*, the two letters נ, inverted. Why so? The *ילקוט* writes of these two simple letters:

הם כבודו של הקב"ה ממש, והם עיקרו של עולם, ובאלו נונין עתיד הקב"ה  
לפרוק להו לישראל ע"י משיח ובגנים בדרך יעקב לנכדיו "וידגו לרוב בקרב הארץ"

They are the very essence of the honor of the Holy One, and with these two letters He will bring the Messiah who will redeem Israel, and it is this that Jacob intended when he blessed his grandchildren

What fantastic extravagance!

But if we ponder these words carefully, and make provision for permissible hyperbole, and translate from the world of Kabbalah to our own modern mode of discourse, we find a great and precious truth. The key is this: The meaning of the word, *נון*, in Aramaic, a cognate language of Hebrew, is "fish." (Thus, in Jacob's blessing, *וידגו לרוב בקרב הארץ*, is translated into Aramaic by Onkelos as *וכנוני ימא ישגון*.) Thus, what this midrash is saying is that in order for the ark to travel, in order for Torah to break out of its confines and bring its blessings of moral commitment and human dignity and spiritual nobility to a pagan mankind, it is necessary to swim upstream, like fish, to defy the power of the raging river and to exercise all one's might and main against the pressures of conformity. For this, one needs incredible courage. Without the readiness to swim upstream when you are convinced it is the only right way to go, you will be swept away into oblivion and never get to the other side.

Lord Jakobovits possessed this rare virtue of courage in abundance. I remember his lonely position as a dove in Israeli matters. I disagreed with him respectfully, but others, including people in the highest echelons, were abusive and belittling in their criticism. But that never moved him. He stood by his principles courageously, firmly, and with dignity.

(at The Jewish Center) Happily, the founders of Yeshiva University possessed this quality and developed the idea of Torah Umadda and moved uptown from the Lower East Side to allow for the growth of its unique mission. The assimilated Jews of the day ridiculed these Orthodox upstarts for their nerve in encroaching on the domain of the Enlightened ones, and the *frum* crowd of the lower East Side considered this an act of treason against the "real" Jews. My experience at Yeshiva has been, as the French say, *plus ça change, plus c'est le meme chose*. Little has changed since...)

## III. Moral Dilemmas

To understand the second feature of leadership it appropriate to focus on an agonizing but fascinating practical problem we face today. John Kenneth Galbraith, one of America's enduring intellectuals, once wrote that, "All of the great leaders have



had one characteristic in common: the willingness to confront unequivocally the major anxiety of people in their time. This... is the essence of leadership." Well, we can't all be *great* leaders, but all who aspire to leadership of any kind must learn this lesson of focus from the giants.

What, then, is the "major anxiety" of our generation of Jews? There are three (*TJC: two*) three "major anxieties" in our generation. One is the security of the State of Israel. Two, to prevent the spiritual demise of our people by bringing them under the wings of Torah. The third is to keep all Jews as one people, to halt the unraveling of our oneness as a people.

That is tall enough an order, but we shall skip over Israel because that is self-evident. The other two represent the most daunting challenges: the two anxieties are incompatible with each other! In more normal times, Saadia Gaon was able to emphasize the Torah as the essence of our nationhood, and R. Yehudah Halevi wrote of Israel as the chief value. But today--the love of Torah and the love of Israel are in conflict. We face two seemingly irreconcilable aims. We want to keep *Judaism* alive and Torah flourishing--but most Jews do not or do not want to observe Halakha. The latest statistics are most depressing--the degree of assimilation continues apace, and about 1.4 million Jews have converted to other faiths... We want to keep *Jews* united in some fashion as one people--but too many Jews are functionally non-Jewish and unity may well demand a price too high for believing Jews to pay. If we are totally loyal to Halakha, we must look askance at 85-90% of Jews in the world; and if we are loyal to כלל ישראל, we violate the integrity of Torah. It is a painful predicament indeed, and surely a perplexity most characteristic of our times.

Let me offer examples from my personal experience, one from the Right and the other from the Left. From the Right--my conversation with the **Belzer Rebbe** (אברהם, רב לאס, איהר פרעגט צו הארב ש קושיא), and the other from the Left: **Uri Avneri** (& the unkosher baloney.)

Here indeed we come to the greatest test of a leader: his ability to handle the *element of tragedy* that inheres in the whole enterprise of leadership, especially Jewish leadership. By "tragedy" I mean the need to reject one good in the face of a higher good, or to accept one evil as the lesser of two evils.

Leadership requires the taking of risks--not only political and financial and social and psychological risks, but also *moral* risks. Not all decisions rise to this high level of tension and seriousness, but the most critical ones do just that. Often, in such cases, the leader is in a condition of *אונס*, of coercion: circumstances force him, much against his will, to an unwanted and immoral option. His most poignant and fateful challenge is not in articulating a vision or managing emergencies or reacting to critics--all of which are important-- but the need to make necessary "dirty" decisions that challenge his most sacred values, poke into the innards of his most cherished beliefs, and upset his deepest self-image. And therein lies the tragic element: the rejection of a good, the embracing of an evil to avoid a greater evil. No moral person can contemplate such choices with equanimity. But leaders must often do so, willy nilly.

There is a remarkable statement by חז"ל which is quoted by Maimonides (in his *פיה"מ לאבות א-ט* although we cannot find the source of the statement in our classical texts). It reads: נקרא רשע למעלה, ונקרא רשע למטה, "One who is appointed to a position of leadership by a community here below, is regarded as wicked up above." A similar thought occurs in the Zohar (111, p.24a). On the verse אשר נשיא יחטא, "If a prince (i.e., a king, a leader) sins," the Zohar adds two words: ודאי יחטא, "he most certainly will sin!" You cannot be a *פרנס* or a *נשיא* without being considered a *רשע* or a *חוטא*.

What a strange thing to say--especially by Maimonides who was himself the leader of his *ציבור*--and what a deterrent to public service on behalf of the community. Granted that some leaders abuse their positions and that others may be neglectful of their duties, is that a reason to say that *all* leaders are regarded by Heaven as wicked or as sinners? Do we not bear enough burdens, and is there not enough to discourage us without this added onus placed upon us by the Talmud, the Zohar, and the Rambam?

What the Rabbis meant, I believe, is this: Leadership involves making hard decisions--or better: *dirty* decisions--choosing between alternatives neither of which is perfect or clean or pure or desirable or even acceptable, but selecting the one which is the least harmful.

Clean decisions between good and evil, right and wrong, helpful or injurious--these are risk-free and do not require leadership. Any intelligent and reasonable person endowed with a modicum of moral judgment can make such decisions. A



leader must be willing to embrace the risk of being a רשע למטה--of being less than perfect or ideal, of being accused of ideological error or moral truancy--if by so doing he carries out his mission of protecting the ציבור מלמטה, the interests of his community in the real world, of sparing them a greater hurt, a more serious injury, a worse moral blemish. One who wants to play it safe and appear always on the side of the angels--even if in doing so he creates an opening for the demons who will surely take over later--such a person has no right to be a leader and had best repair to his own private affairs. Leadership is not an easy task, but that is what leadership is all about. ואי יחטא, אשר נשיא יחטא, there is no way out.

This dilemma is not peculiar to the Jewish community; it is a universal phenomenon. (at The Jewish Center: Over a century ago, for instance, almost a decade after the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass--an abolitionist, orator, and newspaper editor, the son of a slave mother and an unknown white father who escaped from slavery and eventually became a leader in the movement to free the slaves--delivered a rather startling speech in dedicating a monument to Lincoln's memory. He criticized Lincoln for being tepid in his opposition to slavery, yet showed deep understanding of Lincoln as a leader rather than a private citizen. Here is how he formulated the role of Lincoln as a leader:

Looking back to his times and to the condition of his country, we are compelled to admit that this unfriendly feeling on his part may be safely set down as one element of his wonderful success in organizing the loyal American people for the tremendous conflict before them, and bringing them safely through that conflict. His great mission was to accomplish two things: first, to save his country from dismemberment and ruin; and second, to free his country from the great crime of slavery. To do one or the other, or both, he must have the earnest sympathy and the powerful cooperation of his loyal fellow countrymen. Without this primary and essential condition to success his efforts must have been vain and utterly fruitless. Had he put the abolition of slavery before the salvation of the Union, he would have inevitably driven from him a powerful class of the American people and rendered resistance to rebellion impossible. Viewed from the genuine abolition ground, Mr. Lincoln seemed tardy, cold, dull, and indifferent, but measuring him by the sentiment of his country, a sentiment he was bound as a statesman to consult, he was swift, zealous, radical, and determined.

What he was saying is that Lincoln perforce had to be רשע למעלה in order to save his ציבור מלמטה.)

Another example of the kind of tragic choices that confront government leaders was recently cited by Prof. Alan Dershowitz: Winston Churchill decided not to tell the citizens of Coventry that British intelligence had broken the Nazi code and had learned that Coventry would soon be bombed. Churchill chose to *sacrifice* the lives of some British citizens in Coventry in order to *save* more British lives by keeping the Nazis from learning that British intelligence was intercepting their most confidential communiques on an ongoing basis. Clearly, he proved to be a רשע למעלה. But who could blame him?

Perhaps the most relevant instances of such dreadfully difficult decisions in which a lesser evil is chosen in order to avoid a greater evil, occurred during the latter period of the Soviet Communist hegemony in Eastern Europe. In the first such case, after the Khrushchev "thaw," the Chief Rabbi of Moscow, a Rabbi Levin, was sent by the Soviets to visit the Jewish community in this country. He was greeted mostly with courtesy--rather cool courtesy!--and upbraided by others as a Commie stooge. The second case is that of the late Rabbi Moshe Rosen, Chief Rabbi of Romania. He too was adjudged, by many individuals with a penchant for free-wheeling opinions of no substance whatever, as a Communist tool and perhaps even sympathizer.

What crude, heartless, unfeeling, and unintelligent prejudice! Each of these two rabbis was placed by Providence in untenable positions--to have to play along with tyrannical regimes in order to save their Jews from more oppressive persecution, in order to allow them the opportunity to leave for Israel, legally or illegally, and in order to allow their communities to carry on with at least a minimal practice of Judaism. Actually, their accomplishments were heroic. I do not know much about Rabbi Levin, but I knew Rabbi Rosen for many years. He was an astute diplomat, a gifted preacher, a fine thinker, a man who, together with his wife (they had no children) devoted his entire career--indeed, his entire life--to make it possible for Romanian Jews to leave for I Israel, to survive the poverty and persecution that was their lot, and to carry on Jewish communal life that exceeded those of other Communist--and even Western!--countries. They were certainly tormented by the need to "collaborate" with despicable regimes. But they did this because they were leaders, because they knew that their function was primarily to save the people in their charge, even if they had to sully their own moral self-image. And they did this despite the calumny, the shafts, the poisoned arrows and vile insinuations of some of their fellow Jews--who basked on the beaches of sunny Florida or California...



Let us return to our theme. Whether we deal with Jewish or general leadership, the rule is: on many a critical issue, there is no easy way out: *אוי לי מיצרי, אוי לי מיוצרי*; a leader is damned if he does, damned if he doesn't. Such decisions are often difficult and messy. Those unprepared to examine both sides and all alternatives, who are more concerned with their personal ideological purity than with what is good for their people, who are concerned only with the plaudits or criticisms of their own constituencies, who are mortally afraid of controversy and thus unwilling to make unpopular decisions--they are *popular* but not *proper* leaders. Responsible leaders look for the least harmful, the least unprincipled alternative, even if it is less than perfect and has jagged ends on which you may well cut your ideological fingers. There is something worse than being a *רשע למעלה*, and that is--being a *רשע למטה*...

Does this mean that one must *always* choose one alternative--the least unattractive--and totally reject the other? Does it impose upon us a single-mindedness that requires consistency to the bitter end once we have made the fatal decisions? No, certainly not. Even when making tragic choices, the *rejected option must never be totally discarded*. Indeed, this is the way of the Talmud itself. Differing legal opinions are recorded, and a decision is made to uphold one side and reject the other. But the rejected opinion continues to be revered; it is as sacred as the accepted view! Thus, halakhically, if one spends his life studying the opinions of *בית שמאי*, which were overruled in favor of those of *בית הלל*, he has fully and unquestionably fulfilled the mitzvah of *תלמוד תורה*, of studying Torah. So, in our case, we must forget neither the Almighty and His Torah, nor His Jews--wherever they are and no matter what their condition. We must love each unconditionally, even if the two loves sometimes seem to conflict with each other. We may give preference now to one, now to the other, but never do we abandon either of them.

In the question I raised as to the choice between the integrity of Halakha versus the unity of the Jewish people, the answer is: one must be assigned priority, but the other must never be dismissed. In our particular case, the *אהבת תדב"א* taught that *אהבת ישראל* trumps *התורה*, and that is my preference--but Heaven help us if we treat Torah lightly, if we fail to consult the wisdom of Halakha at every step.

So, a leader with conscience must somehow accommodate both opposite options if at all possible, even if he gives preference to one over the other, offering less than total right to either side. Never can he escape the need to judge each issue afresh and use responsible judgment, sometimes giving more weight to one, sometimes to another, always keeping both values before him. Of course, this ensures that he will be roundly criticized by advocates of both sides. I often find myself in that position, and I confess that I am getting used to it. I feel unemployed without it. It's like having a tight and uncomfortable pair of shoes that, if it's the only pair you have, you learn to live with it and even love it. And it's still better than going barefoot.

## V. Love and Leadership

The third aspect of leadership I wish to mention is the relation of leaders to followers. All that we have mentioned thus far -- the courage to go it alone and risk unpopularity, the courage to make terrible choices between two goods or two evils--all this comes to naught if a leader does not really and truly love his people, ready to sacrifice and pay heavily for them even while disagreeing with them and being vilified by many.

A leader must know that his authority, effectiveness, and strength come from his people. R. Yehuda Halevi wrote that, "If there were no Jews, there would be no Torah. They did not derive their high position from Moses, but Moses received his for their sake" (Kuzari II:56). And there is no question that Moses loved his Jews. When God offered to destroy Israel and reconstitute it from his loins, Moses was ready to abandon his posterity and be erased from the divine book--*ועתה אם תשא* ועתה אם תשא. And the Talmud (*Men. 65*) tells us that even the heretical Sadducees understood that Moses loved Israel: *משה רבינו אוהב ישראל היה*.

The leader must love his people, even if they annoy him, trouble his spirits, fail to understand him. But what if they undermine him, criticize him mercilessly without cause, without justification, without reason, without intelligence? How far can love take you when the beneficiaries of your work and heart and tears ridicule you for it? Can you possibly love them?

Yes, most certainly, Moses loved the Jews. Yet he moved his own tent *למחנה*, outside the camp, away from his rebellious and chronically complaining Jews. How could he like a people who never grasped his ideas and ideals--people for whom constant grumbling became a way of life. He offered them freedom and destiny and greatness, and what did they



demand?--הדגה אשר נאכל במצרים חנם... "the fish we ate in Egypt that was for free, and the cucumbers and melons and leeks and onions and garlic" (Nu. 11:5). He offered faith, they asked for fish. He presented *kedushah*, they replied: cucumbers. Moses spoke of holiness and redemption, and they came back with melons and leeks and onions and garlic. He gave them the Ten Commandments, and they responded with a grocery list for the local market...

How can we say that he loved them--those who proved so unlovable, so unworthy of his supreme sacrifice, who did not understand him, who accused him of pilfering their funds and who even suspected him of philandering with their wives?

The answer, I suggest, is that he surely *loved* them but did not particularly *like* them. (I do not know of any equivalent distinction in Yiddish. The closest the Hebrew comes to this is the difference between אהבה and חיבה.) He resented their obtuseness, was embarrassed by their pettiness, and deplored their superficiality--so he didn't like them. But he loved them more than life itself, more than he loved himself. As my friend Mike Tabor once said, "You like *because*, you love *despite*..."

**(at The Jewish Center:** Well, that was Moses. The rest of us mortals can hardly aspire to his level of love, nor dare we emulate or even entertain his utter disdain for his people. Is there, then, anything that contemporary leaders can learn from him? I believe there is and it applies to leaders of all kinds, but I will confine myself to spiritual and educational leadership--the kind I know best.

The modern leader who loves his people but is frustrated and exasperated by them need not and should not move his tent to חוץ למחנה. But he should manage his life by developing a very special attitude--*a sense of humor*. (Conjecture: If Moses had had a sense of humor, it might have saved him much heartache...)

I refer to our own Modern Orthodox community. Many Rabbis talk out their problems with me, and I counsel them--to develop a better sense of humor, to see the comical in the harsh criticism, the absurd in the obsessions. This occurs mostly in the sensitivity on religious direction, the Great Left-Right Axis. We Modern Orthodox Jews pride ourselves on our tolerance, yet how intolerant we are of any petty movement on that Right-Left spectrum! We have, in too many ways, become a community of nit-pickers.

For instance: a Rabbi regularly concludes his requisite announcements after *Musaf* by saying גוט שבת but one Shabbat he says שבת שלום -- *Aha!* He's going left and ח"ו becoming a Zionist! In the reverse situation, there is an even greater *aha!* -- he's leading us back into Ultra-Orthodoxy ר"ל... Or the Koppel Contests: is he wearing a velvet or a knitted *Yarmulka*--or a black one or a colorful one, or a larger one or a smaller one; a great issue here. Or take the matter of a choir: I know of one congregation where the Rabbi quite innocently asked the cantor to hurry the services by dispensing with the choir this once. The congregation was abuzz, and the next day an emergency meeting of the Board was called to investigate whether the Rabbi was taking the shul back into the dark Ages... So many of these frivolous, nonsensical, and truly nugatory issues crowd out genuinely significant questions from the synagogue agenda. Silly trivialities are often elevated to the level of theological principle, one that would make the medieval debates on the number of angels that can dance on the head of a pin sound eminently normal. It seems that in almost in every move of the spiritual leader, some people see subversive efforts to upend the Halakha--or sinister plots to return us to the Middle Ages. There is something terribly funny about all this. I often entertain reveries of offering officers of our *shuls* a kit containing 4 items: *calipers*--to measure the size of the rabbi's yarmulka; a *stop watch*--to test the length of his davenning עשרה; a *number counter*--to measure the number of shakes he *shukkels* during his עשרה; and a *ruler* for the officers to measure the width of the brim of his fedora--or the change in the length of the Rebbitzin's skirt.

I confess that my sense of humor failed me some years ago when I received a phone call from a Kollel student from some out-of-town yeshiva who inquired about a young lady recommended to him for a *shidduch*. The only three questions were: does she eat only "glatt," does she drink only חלב ישראל, and "does she hold by the Manhattan *Eruv*." I pleaded ignorance on the first two questions, assured him that she most surely did not do the two of them together, and told him I thought he was a colossal fool for inquiring only about externals and evincing no desire to know if she was honest, grateful, modest, God-fearing, respectful... Truth to tell, I should have reacted with more humor and less annoyance. But...

But are we so-called Modern Orthodox any less superficial, any less intolerant in our own communities?



Believe me: we are all--rabbis and laymen alike--subject to the same pressures and the same inanities. But a rabbi or layman who wishes to lead can preserve his health only if he attains a sense of humor, a sense of the absurd and the comical--together with the ability to disguise it with a most serious mien. Only thus can he or she save his/her sanity and become a creative Jewish leader. And continue to love his people even more.

I mentioned laymen, so let me add an important point. The great R. Nachman of Bratzlav writes (ליקוטי מוהר"ן, א-נו) that every Jew has בחינת מלכות שהוא מושל על העולם, capacity for great leadership, but while for some it's באתגליא, "revealed" and open and apparent--what we normally mean by leadership--for all others leadership is באתכסיא, "hidden," for they are מושל על הנשמות. To translate that from the arcane terminology of Hasidism to contemporary language: some lead openly and publicly, but everyone can and should exercise spiritual influence on others and thus they are truly leaders--in this "hidden" manner.

This means that, in a synagogue context, every one must participate in the act of leadership--every one, not only the Rabbi and President and officers. If there is work to be done, *all* must work. If there is a campaign for funds, *all* must give and get for the sake of the shul. All..

Only thus, with the "hidden" efforts of the community and the "revealed" activities of the Rabbi or other communal leader, can the cooperative enterprise of leadership advance the cause of the synagogue, the community, and all Israel.)

Sometimes, the exercise of leadership is involuntary—where the leader is even unaware of his role. **ST: Mendel the Waiter on QE2...** So, each of us often—even usually—plays a leadership role, whereby he or she brings his/her influence to bear upon others. That means we have got to act so that we reflect well upon God and Torah and Israel. As representatives of Judaism, we have at all times disport ourselves with the dignity and integrity that we Jewish ascribed to our people, our Torah and our Father in Heaven.

In conclusion....



## A Leader's Self-Doubt

The final reason for our abandonment of our leadership role--and perhaps the most fundamental cause--is our own self-doubt. We suffer from an inner failure of philosophic nerve. We have been bullied into doubting our own *shittah*, the one on which we have built our personal and professional lives. When one or another of the sides that surround us shouts loud enough and long enough, we begin to wonder if maybe, maybe we were wrong all along, that others are right and we are in error. And there is nothing more deadly than that kind of pernicious self-doubt. It kills a man's initiative, his dignity and, finally, his integrity.

This, then, is a time for us to reaffirm our faith in our own most fundamental principles, and our confidence in the correctness of our convictions. Assailed by Right and Left, we must stand up with strength, with both the courage of our convictions and the conviction of our courage.

There is a time for self-questioning, even for a degree of self-doubt. But now is not such a time. The kind of *Yiddishkeit* we stand for must be reasserted when it is assaulted.

The letter ע in the word שמע of שמע ישראל is writ large, it is an עין רבתי. Why so? R. Samson Raphael Hirsch explains: it is large in order not to be mistaken for an א, for the word שמא means "maybe," "perhaps"; it is the sign of self-doubt, of hesitation, of unsureness. Such שמא is the very opposite of שמע, which connotes a commanding certainty and rightness.

We are attacked for being true to the Torah heritage, supposedly marking us as Neanderthals and as benighted advocates of antidemocratic intolerance. At the same we are assailed from the other side and are disqualified for not being authentically Orthodox because we do not pay obeisance to a political organization which lays claim to be the annointed apostle of the Absolute Truth of Sinai to the exclusion of non-members or non-sympathizers; or because we believe in Torah U-Madda; or because we affirm that the State of Israel is no exception to the principle that everything in this world is brought about by the השגחה העליונה; or for our insistence that כלל ישראל includes those who do not necessarily agree with us on every count. But no matter where the attacks come from, we must have the strength and the courage to proclaim שמע for our principles--שמע and not, Heaven forbid, שמא.

Kenneth Clark concluded his massive study, *Civilization*, by stating, "It is lack of confidence, more than anything else, that kills a civilization." If what we have cherished as our interpretation of our "civilization," is to thrive and flourish, then we must rid ourselves of our שמא stance and return to a firm and self-respecting שמע attitude.

The halakhic test for a questionably kosher spine of an animal, to determine if the חוט השדרה is kosher or *treifa*, is to hold the spine at its base and see if it wavers. If it leans to one side or another, it is *treifa*; if it stands erect, it is *kasher*.

That, in sum, is a test of effective rabbinic leadership: a Rabbi to be kosher has to have backbone, a חוט השדרה that doesn't crumble or bend over submissively

## A Leader must Dream, have Vision

The challenges of this new century loom before Jewish leadership as highly intimidating, as crushingly difficult. So let me tell you what I recently heard about the late and much lamented *gaon*, Rabbi Kahanaman, the Rosh Yeshiva of Ponovezh. When Bnei Brak was still a collection of sand dunes, he tried to convince Ben Gurion of the ambition he had of building a great מקום תורה in this desolate area. Ben Gurion said, רבי, איר חלומט, To which Rabbi Kahanaman replied, קען זיין אז, נא, איך חלום--אבער איך שלאף ניט...