

A lion cub is Yehudah ... He crouches, lies down like a lion, and like an awesome lion, who dares rouse him. (49:9)

The Torah compares five of Yaakov *Avinu*'s sons to animals: Yehudah – a lion; Binyamin – a wolf; Dan – a snake; Yissachar – a donkey; Naftali – a deer. While four of them are identified directly with the animal, Yehudah stands out as being compared both to a lion cub and a full-grown lion. *Chazal* address the singular distinction accorded to Yehudah. They explain that, because of his future leadership and monarchial obligations, he was given both the might of a lion and the brazenness of a young cub. As *Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl*, observes, Yehudah was to combine the courage of youth with the prudence and sagacity that accompany age.

Veritably, two forms of courage come into play in a person. One is the courage associated with youth. Lacking the wisdom that comes with age, the youth disregards danger and throws caution into the wind. The experience of members of the older generation does not appear to impress youth. They refuse to back down once their minds are made up. They are bold, unrestrained and fearless. Their attitude should not be ignored, even though it is foolhardy, because, at times, their forwardness and boldness are what the leadership of *Kol Yisrael* needs. Endless deliberations are great, when one who has nothing to do and a very limited agenda, and he is trying to find an excuse for staying out of the fray. Sometimes, however, the situation is so out of control that the best course of action is to plunge head first into the fire or water.

We recognize another form of courage: the courage that comes with age. Some have courage, which is unquestionably an enviable character trait, and some have courage that is borne of and tempered with good judgment. This is a bravery that weighs in all factors -- both pro and con -- and all the repercussions resulting from his decision. Such a person sees all the risks clearly and decides accordingly.

Shevet Yehudah exemplified both forms of courage: that of the lion cub; and that of the mature full-grown lion. They represented both stages of the lion's growth. The cub prepares for leadership, testing the waters as he grows and matures. Only later does he become a lion – the king of beasts. Likewise, with *David HaMelech*'s ascension to the monarchy. He first served as a minister in Shaul's government, and later he became king. *Shevet Yehudah* has continued to reign in various forms of Jewish leadership, all in preparation for that long-awaited, glorious day when the *Melech HaMoshiach* will be revealed.

I want to examine, however, one aspect of leadership – the leadership of the lion – who has matured and successfully guided the nation, or whomever are his subjects/followers. At a certain time, he has reached the age of preparing a successor, stepping down and paving the way for others to assume positions of prominence. Some leaders find it challenging to mentor and empower future leaders, because they feel that it diminishes their own role. A classic example of an individual who not only proved this wrong, but established the infrastructure and educational

leadership of our country was *Horav Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz, zl*, the architect of Torah in America.

Rav Shraga Feivel stands out as a seminal figure in American Torah *chinuch*, particularly for his visionary approach to leadership and succession. As *menahel* of Yeshivah Torah Vodaath, he sent his best *talmidim* to help build fledgling *yeshivos* – even at the expense of his own *yeshivah*. He meticulously cultivated future leaders to ensure the continued growth of Torah. He exemplified the archetype leader who understands and accepts the evolving and transient nature of his own tenure as leader, diligently and thoughtfully preparing and empowering successors to uphold, advance and expand his mission – even if their personal approach might differ from his. Rav Shraga's legacy serves as a model for leadership succession within the parameters of Torah *chinuch*. The only way to truly perpetuate one's leadership is by investing in others and empowering them to carry forward the vision. Genuine leadership is never about the person, but always about the mission.