

“He (Moshe) took Yehoshua and stood him before Elazar the Kohen and before the entire assembly.” (27:22)

The Yalkut describes the scene in which Yehoshua was “handed over” to the assembly, as Moshe Rabbeinu presented his successor to the nation. Moshe and the people lifted their heads to listen to Yehoshua. What did Yehoshua say? He said, “Blessed is Hashem Who gave the Torah to His Nation, Yisrael, through Moshe Rabbeinu.” We all know that a leader’s inauguration address sets the tone for his administration. His remarks are carefully weighed and articulated in the best possible manner. Ostensibly, Yehoshua was no different. He meticulously prepared his first major address, his acceptance speech, with care and deliberation. Why did he choose to include the fact that the Torah was given to Klal Yisrael through Moshe? He is about to commence a new reign. He is the new leader. Should he not emphasize his plans and aspirations for his leadership of the people?

In addressing this question, the Kesav Sofer first focuses on the distinction between Moshe and Yehoshua, noting their disparate approaches towards assuming the mantle of leadership. When Hashem first asked Moshe to lead the Jewish People, Moshe refused to accept the honor. Seven days went by, and each time Moshe told Hashem, “I am not worthy; I am not the appropriate person for the position.” We should expect at least the same from Yehoshua. Should not the disciple follow in the footsteps of his great mentor? Yet, we find nowhere written that Yehoshua spurned the opportunity to become Klal Yisrael’s leader. Why? Was Yehoshua any better qualified or suited for the position?

We assert that Moshe’s position, his function as leader, was of a different nature than that of Yehoshua. Chazal draw the distinction between the two leaders when they state, “Moshe’s face is like the sun, while Yehoshua’s face is like the moon.” Chazal are teaching a significant lesson, says the Kesav Sofer. When Moshe conceded to the power, he found nothing prepared. Klal Yisrael, as a nation, was at best a figment of the imagination. Moshe’s leadership, his unique personality and sterling character, his ability to inspire and to infuse the people with Torah values and guide them towards observance, set the stage. Moshe was able to build, to create “yeish me’ayin,” ex nihilo, something from nothing. Moshe was like the sun that illuminates with its own light. It does not draw its power from another source. It is the source. Moshe felt himself unworthy of this daunting position. He, therefore, rejected it.

Yehoshua, on the other hand, did not have such a tall order. He discovered a nation whose exposure to the Revelation of the Almighty was unprecedented. They were organized, complete and orderly, each man in his camp by his flag. Every Jew knew his place and what was demanded of him. Yehoshua’s function was similar to that of the moon: to continue the sun’s light; to carry it forth; to spread its illumination; to maintain its brilliance. This is how Yehoshua would lead the nation: he would carry; he would maintain his rebbe, Moshe’s, legacy.

Yehoshua had no reason to defer. Nothing was expected of him that he could not achieve. This is what Yehoshua sought to emphasize when he related that Hashem gave the Torah to Klal Yisrael through Moshe Rabbeinu. Yehoshua was telling them, "I do not intend to innovate. I will not append or amend the Torah that Hashem gave you through Moshe. My only purpose is to maintain, to guard, and to continue – to see to it that the Torah that was given through Moshe will spread forth through all of Klal Yisrael." Indeed, this is the function of every leader, to maintain the heritage, to continue the legacy of the past, so that there will be a viable future.