

"Hashem said to Moshe, 'Take to yourself Yehoshua ben Nun, a man in whom there is spirit, and lean your hand upon him.'" (27:18)

Our *parsha* begins by recounting Pinchas's courageous act of zealousness which took place in the presence of Moshe *Rabbeinu* and the entire Jewish leadership. Everyone stood watching while Zimri flaunted his repulsive act. Yet, only one person stepped forth and followed through with the *halachic* demand for purging *Klal Yisrael* of this incursion. Pinchas demonstrated decisiveness in reacting to Zimri's transgression. He was not concerned with "what people might say." He did not act impulsively. He responded bravely to the travesty, catalyzing an end to a tragic episode in the history of *Klal Yisrael*.

It would, therefore, seem natural that Pinchas would become Moshe *Rabbeinu's* successor. After all, who else had displayed such leadership capabilities? Who else had the experience and had actually earned the promotion? Yet, who was selected for the position of *Klal Yisrael's* second leader? Yehoshua, Moshe's trusted disciple, was chosen to shepherd the Jewish flock into *Eretz Yisrael* and lay the foundation for the young nation. Does this not seem uncharacteristic? We may also question Yehoshua's immediate acquiescence to the position. Was not Moshe asked by Hashem a number of times before he accepted the leadership over *Bnei Yisrael*?

Horav Eliyahu Schlesinger, Shlita, responds to these questions with a profound lesson in the essence of Jewish leadership. Moshe *Rabbeinu's* tenure as leader of *Bnei Yisrael* was somewhat stormy. He endured complaint after complaint, suffering dissent and abuse as he shaped and molded the nation in the cradle of its birth. It would be no wonder that in seeking a new leader the people would look for an individual with qualities that reflected viridity and change. They wanted someone more in tune with the times, who would relax some of the "archaic" rules that had "encumbered" them these past forty years. They sought someone who would inject new life, pave a fresh path to the new land which they were about to enter.

Chazal teach us that when Yehoshua was designated as Moshe's successor, they "stood him" up in the center of the people, anxiously anticipating his first speech. What was he going to say? They hoped for a new direction, a new approach. Yehoshua's first words, however, as cited by the *Yalkut Shimoni*, were, "*Bless Hashem that gave the Torah to Yisrael through Moshe Rabbeinu.*" Suddenly, they realized that Yehoshua's leadership was to be the same as Moshe's. He was not innovative. Instead, he represented continuity. His *chiddushim*, new suggestions, were simple: retain the teachings of Moshe *Rabbeinu*; continue along the *derech ha'emes*, path of truth, tread along the path forged for you by the quintessential leader of *Klal Yisrael*. Change is necessary only when something is wrong. Nothing is wrong with a *Torah* way of life, as taught to us by the greatest teacher of our people, the one who brought Hashem's *Torah* down to us - Moshe *Rabbeinu*.

Moshe's tenure was indeed stormy. It is no wonder that it was difficult for him to accept the reins of

leadership. His mandate was to build a nation literally from scratch, to transmit, teach and imbue these people with *Torah* and *mitzvos*. He had to tend to their occasionally petty complaints and deal with their rebelliousness. This was truly a tall order. He refused the position because he understood what was involved and the tremendous responsibility that accompanied it. He had no model to follow; he was to be the first leader.

Yehoshua, on the other hand, served Moshe faithfully. He never left his side. He learned the specifics of leadership and the most successful manner in which to deal with this nation. He was an individual who had learned first hand from his *rebbe* how to lead the nation. Yehoshua had the strength to maintain the tradition handed down to him from the previous generation. He was truly worthy of being the next leader. Pinchas acted decisively and prevented a further incursion into Judaism. His response quelled the plague that was destroying the people. His action was, however, something new, something that had not taken place before. Inasmuch as his actions were essential for *Klal Yisrael's* future, it was important not to elect a leader because of his ability to change. Rather, the leader was chosen for his capacity to follow and maintain the previously established tradition. Yehoshua, who demonstrated that power, was therefore selected to be Moshe's successor.