

Young Zionist

Why Lead?

Anthony Angel

I was travelling on a journey when I decided to write this article. I'm neither the first boger to travel down this particular path, nor am I going to be the last, yet for each individual who goes along this route, life is rarely straightforward. There are often unexpected events and unforeseen circumstances, that may delay you or force you to go in a different direction, but you eventually end up back on track, albeit a little bit wiser and more worldly than you were before.

You are now probably expecting a clichéd article about my FZY journey, peppered with introspection, poorly re-hashed ideas stolen from *peulot* (programmes) or past YZ articles and most importantly, tenuous references to the Wizard of Oz. I can assure you that this is not the case. I previously stated that I was travelling on a journey, but I neglected to mention that it was a very literal journey; the aforementioned path I was travelling down was, in fact, the M1.

The American political activist and former presidential candidate Ralph Nader once said *I start with the premise that the function of leadership is to produce more leaders, not more followers*. This quote summarises Jewish leadership. Many people will have progressed from *chanichim* (participants) to *madrachim* (leaders), but won't have stopped to ask why bother being a *madrach*. What is the virtue of being a leader? There are several obvious answers, including:

- Because it looks like fun,
- Because I believe in the ideology of the movement,
- Because my friends are doing it,
- Because I love playing waaaa
- Because I feel a sense of debt towards my *madrachim*.

These are all good reasons, and I believe they are valid answers to the question “Why be a *madrach*?” but there is another reason. Leadership is a Jewish value. It is not codified, and there is no simple way of defining it, as there would be with keeping *kosher* or observing *Shabbat*, for example, but throughout the *Tenakh* we are given numerous examples of leaders and the challenges they faced.

There is an idea fundamental to Orthodox Judaism which can be simplified to: G-d doesn't make spelling mistakes. Every letter of the *Torah* is written intentionally, and an exegetic study will allow us to understand even the most seemingly innocuous happening. Based on this premise, the fact that the *Torah* is written as a captivating, living history and not just as list of historical events, laws, statutes and guidelines means something. We are not merely shown the outcome, we are shown the journey and the evolution of the Jewish people. One of the reasons for this is so that we can learn from the real-life experiences of the characters in the Bible. As an example, we witness the development of Avram from being the son of an idol-merchant into the first monotheist and his renaming as Abraham. By being able to see Abraham's roots and his development into a leader, we are shown that good leaders are not born, but they are made.

There is a difference between the English words leader & leadership, and the Hebrew words *madrach* & *hadracha* (leadership). The *shoresh*, or root of both words is *derech*, which literally translates to way, or path. (Incidentally the word *derech* itself stems from the verb *darach* – which means to step or tread.) The respective translations of *madrach* & *hadracha* as leader and leadership don't do justice to the intricacies and the nuances of the Hebrew language. A *madrach* can be defined as “one who shows the path” but could be seen as a mixture of educator, guide or trainer (in *Ivrit*, a *madrach* can also be a telephone directory – but this is far less relevant!) Similarly, *hadracha* could be defined as “showing the way.”

One of the sources from the *Torah* about leadership comes from Shemot 18:20, where Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, is instructing him. This passage shows the responsibility which is inherent within leadership and the link between leading people and educating them. As a leader, Moses is expected to guide his people.; *And thou shalt teach them the statutes and the laws, and shalt show them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do.*

In the introduction to his book, *The Genesis of Leadership*, Rabbi Nathan Laufer states that *every leader, no matter how naturally charismatic and authoritative, must learn to become more effective and successful.* He continues to say that *by cataloguing its heroes mistakes... the Bible teaches us something vitally important about leadership: no being – human or divine is perfect. Every person and every leader makes mistakes, and must do so to learn and grow.* Paraphrasing the rest of the paragraph, Laufer continues to stress the importance of being able to learn from your mistakes. **It is humbling to know that better leaders than ourselves make mistakes, learn from them and are continuously on a journey of self-improvement, always aiming higher.** The idea of the perfect *madrach* is an unattainable ideal. There is no magic formula and no such thing as the perfect *madrach*. Nevertheless, the impossibility of the target should not prohibit us from trying.

The concept of *dugma ishit*, leading by example, also stems from the bible. Leaders did not control people by power alone, they controlled them by living the virtues that they were preaching. Moses lived according to G-d's will. In the *parsha* (portion) of Chukat, when he disobeyed G-d, by hitting a rock with his staff, he was given the severe punishment of not being allowed to enter the land of Israel. Moses was looked up to as the leader of the Jewish people. When he didn't sanctify G-d as instructed, he could not instruct the rest of the Jewish people to sanctify G-d and was duly punished.

I realise that equating a game of waaaa with leading the Jewish people out of Egypt is a bit far-fetched, but by following in the footsteps of all who have gone before us, from Abraham, through Moses, the Kings of Israel, the Rabbis of the *Talmud* & the Middle Ages, through to the birth of the modern Zionist movement and the leaders of Israel (to name but a few) and then to not forget the *madrachim* who took us on Tour or *machane*, we are part of a system and the next link in a chain which stretches back for thousands of years.

As FZY hits its 100th year, thinking thematically about the development of the Jewish people in the last one hundred years we can realise how much of an impact proactive leadership can have, and how important it is that we are at the forefront of continuing this tradition.

Anthony is the current Netzig for Manchester