

Walk through the Parsha

with **Rabbi David Walk**



Pi-N'CHAS

Changing of the Guard

For some reason, the historically practical procedure of the changing of the guard has, in many places around the world, become a major tourist attraction, full of pomp. On the one hand, I remember my time in the IDF and when I relieved someone from guard duty, it was not impressive. If you got a smile, it was cool.

Although I've never seen the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace (perhaps the world's most famous example), I have been a number of times at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington, VA and once at the Amalienborg Palace in Copenhagen. Cool, but not momentous. In this week's Torah reading, we read about one of the most significant 'changing of the guard' ceremonies in human history.

Moshe hands over the reins of power to his faithful disciple Yehoshua. What's most fascinating to me is that it is a very modest ceremony. Very much like the passing of the baton to Elazar by Aharon last week. No pomp! No ceremony! Reading these stories makes us feel like Peeping Toms.

Questions abound! But I will only deal with the actual process, and its implications for us, the heirs to this event.

Interestingly, it doesn't seem like the ascent of Yehoshua was a foregone conclusion. Rashi suggests that since God acquiesced to the request of the daughters of Tz'lofchad, there was a chance that Moshe could make a request for his own family. According to Rashi, Moshe wanted his sons to succeed him as leader of the Jewish nation.

I'm not convinced. But the dialogue between Moshe and God seems to assume that the leadership of Yehoshua was not a foregone conclusion. Moshe requests: God... Appoint a person over the community... (Bamidbar 27:16)

It seems to me that Moshe is neither acting on behalf of his sons nor for Yehoshua. I think Moshe wants God to appoint whoever is the best candidate. Remember, Moshe is the most humble person ever (12:3). He's leaving the decision to God, but he records for us the parameters of the job: Appoint a person who will go out before them, who will lead them out and bring them in. In order that, God's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd (27:17).

Moshe sees his role as mentor, always. He is always Moshe Rabbeinu, the great pedagogue.

According to the Netziv, Moshe specifies two requirements. The first is to lead the nation in war. The true leader personally goes out before the army, as opposed to foreign kings who await the results on their throne. He never expects anyone else to take on more danger than he does himself. Secondly, he leads like a shepherd, who provides for the physical needs of the people. Moshe was the facilitator of the manna; the new leader would have to find new sources of sustenance.

God responds to Moshe's request by settling the question of the succession: Take Yehoshua bin Nun, who is inspired, and place your hand upon him (then involve Elazar Kohen Gadol for a public ceremony), place part of your HOD (majesty, authority, honor, glory, splendor, power) upon him, so that the community will obey him (verse 20).

Now, something unexpected happens. Moshe doesn't follow God's instructions with his normal perfection. The verse records that Moshe followed God's instructions (verse 22). However, the next verse says that he 'laid his hands' on him. Whoa! God said 'hand'; Moshe placed 'hands'.

This detail opens a new direction in our investigation. We suddenly enter the world of pedagogy. Moshe Rabbeinu informs us how to be a

perfect mentor. But before we discuss that point, we should visit the long list of metaphors for Torah transmission.

There are a number of analogies to water sources in the list of metaphors for Torah teaching. Water, just like Torah itself, is the very source of life. We also compare mountain springs to the creative sources of Torah ideas. Cisterns are also compared to those special students who preserve every drop of Torah information that they study. We also think of streams which carry water to the next town or settlement, and remind us of Torah flowing from generation to generation.

Our tradition also thinks of agriculture as a wonderful idiom for education. We plant our Torah in the fertile minds of our beloved students. We sow our seeds deep in the earth, and wait for them to blossom. Just as we plant ideas in our students and stand back and watch the beautiful blooms.

Personally, I would suggest my own original analogy: a bridge. The Torah information passes both ways. As the Gemara says: And from my students I learned the most (Makot 10a).

But in our verses, the Tiferet Shlomo (Shlomo Rabinowicz of Radomsk) refers to two other very famous figures of speech used often to

describe the transmission of Torah. The first is the lighting of a lamp. The teacher inspires the student to burn with the glow of Torah enlightenment, but, in the process, the mentor loses nothing, that flame continues as brightly as before.

The Rebbe claims that's what God requested: Place one hand upon his head. However, Moshe did more: He placed both hands! The Rebbe compares that act to another simile: Teaching is like pouring a liquid from one container into another vessel.

Moshe loved the Jewish people and he loved Yehoshua. So, according to the Rebbe: he did more than he was commanded. As Rashi says, "He laid his hands upon him", both hands, more than he had been instructed. This explains the Midrash in Ha'azinu: when Yehoshua expounded Torah, Moshe could not comprehend what he was teaching, because Moshe had given Yehoshua a portion of his own soul, and thereby something was diminished from himself.

Teaching isn't just a job or a task. It's a mission. And that brings us to our last metaphor for teaching: It's comparable to parenting.

Basically, Moshe Rabbeinu's final official act was to demonstrate that just like parents for children, the great pedagogues love their students more than themselves. God's request

was to share with Yehoshua; Moshe's act was to sacrifice for him. That's a Rebbe. 