

Jacob's Ladder

Rabbi Dr. Jerry Hochbaum

The Diverse Trumpets Of Leadership

This week's *parshah* contains an extraordinary lesson for Jewish leaders about how they are required to fulfill their responsibilities as leaders.

Hashem instructs Moshe, "Asey lecha shtei chatzot-zros" – make two bugles for yourself. "V'yihyu lecha l'mikra ha'edah ulimassa es hamachanos" – they should be used by you to assemble the people and to mobilize the tribes. The Torah then provides specific details how, for whom, and when they are to be used. One trumpet will be used to call the leaders of the tribes to assemble. Two trumpets will be required to announce to the tribes that the time has come for them to decamp and continue their journey toward the Promised Land. The Torah then prescribes when to use plain blasts on those instruments – *tekiyot* – and when to use broken blasts – *teruot*. The trumpets will also be used on other occasions: to mobilize the people to defend themselves from their enemies and to celebrate Jewish festivals and joyous occasions.

There is something unique in the instructions about these trumpets. The Torah adds a word, "*lecha*," in the initial instruction, make for *yourself*. There are two interpretations regarding this additional word, *lecha*. One is that the cost for these trumpets should not come from the community but from Moshe's pocket, his own funds. The second is, to my mind, even more instructive: that these trumpets can be used only by Moshe, nobody else. Indeed, after his death they were to be hidden away; no other leader in the future is permitted to use them.

That latter instruction appears somewhat strange. When I once visited the palace of the English kings, there were rooms full of displays of the royal objects passed down from previous kings and queens to be used by their successors. Others were there just for display. Why then were Moshe's trumpets not only discarded, but hidden?

The answer to that question speaks to the responsibilities of all leaders. Moshe was the greatest leader of the Jewish people. In part, this was because he understood the needs of the Jewish people both while they were slaves and after they were liberated. His genius lay in his capacity to devise strategies and approaches to deal with the special challenges they faced, collectively and individually, during those divergent eras. He also developed his own vocabulary for communicating with them – plain long blasts or short broken blasts, whatever the condition of the people required to mobilize and move them forward.

Moshe's trumpets, the instruments of his leadership to liberate the Jews from Egypt and guide them the desert toward the Promised Land, grew out of his special capacities and talents and the unique circumstances of the Jews at those specific times. His trumpets needed therefore to be interred to allow his successor, Joshua, to develop his own instruments of leadership, suited to *his* personality and adapted to the very different challenges he faced as the leader of the Jewish people – entry into, conquest of, and settlement in the Promised Land.

And so it continues for all our history over the centuries. "*Asei lecha*," each leader is required to construct his own trumpets, compatible with his special skills and temperament as a leader, and adapted to the unique challenges the Jewish people face in his era. Those "trumpets" need, in turn, to be interred subsequent to his leadership, so that the next leader can do the same.

Our history is replete with such successful transitions. To cite two from our time:

Harav Kook – the prophet who successfully developed the religious framework for world Jewry for their return to Zion in our lifetime, a colossal achievement that both the religious and non-religious segments of our people required.

Harav Soloveitchik – who developed the vocabulary that enabled a generation of young Jews born in this country, far removed socially and intellectually from European Orthodoxy, to transplant Torah on these shores.

May we merit similar leaders in the future.

Rabbi Dr. Jerry Hochbaum, who has served the global Jewish community for more than four decades, has recently retired as the executive vice president of the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture.



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Mark Meyer Appel with Congressman John Lewis



US Representative Chris Van Hollen presenting Gary M. and Pennie Abramson with an award



Congressman Joe Kennedy presenting award to Mark Meyer Appel, founder of the Bridge Multicultural and Advocacy Project



L-R: Rabbi Potasnik, Greg Rosenbaum, Stanley Treitel, Sen. Blumenthal, Sen. Kaine, Rep. John Lewis, Rabbi Shemtov, Ezra Friedlander, Rabbi Kleinerman, Richard M. Horowitz, Rabbi Richard Boruch Rabinowitz, Rabbi Hershel Lutch of Aish International