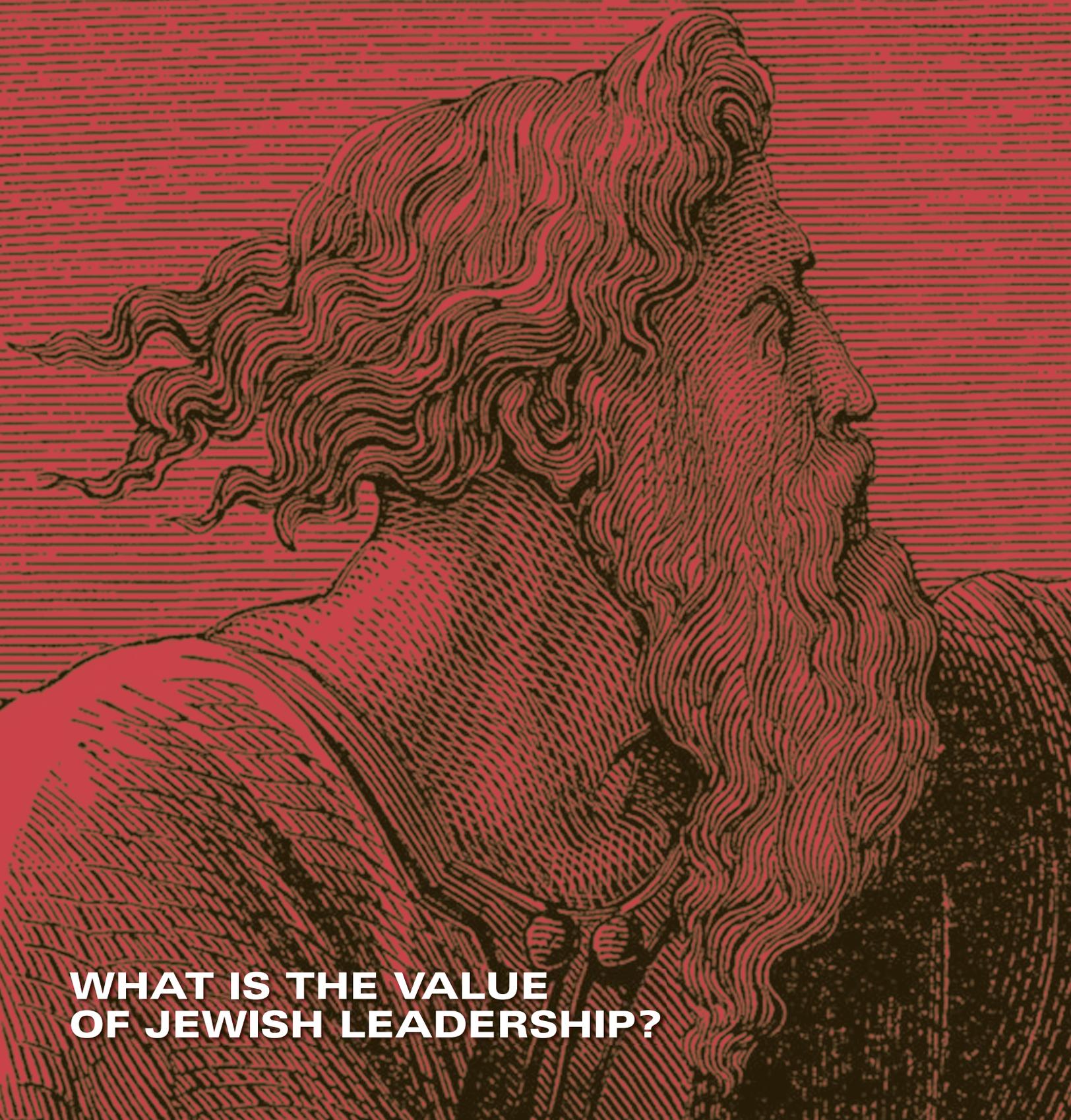




THE STEINHARDT
FOUNDATION
FOR JEWISH LIFE

CONTACT

AUTUMN 2008/TISHREI 5769 VOLUME 11 NUMBER 1 THE JOURNAL OF THE STEINHARDT FOUNDATION FOR JEWISH LIFE



**WHAT IS THE VALUE
OF JEWISH LEADERSHIP?**

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CONTACT is produced and distributed by The Steinhardt Foundation for Jewish Life, 6 East 39th Street, 10th floor, New York, NY 10016.

All issues of Contact are available for download at www.steinhardtfoundation.org/journal.html

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The Steinhardt Foundation for Jewish Life is dedicated to strengthening and transforming American Jewish Life to ensure a flourishing, sustainable community in a fully integrated free society. We seek to revitalize Jewish identity through educational and cultural initiatives that are designed to reach out to all Jews, with an emphasis on those who are on the margins of Jewish life, as well as to advocate for and support Hebrew and Jewish literacy among the general population.

WHAT IS THE VALUE OF JEWISH LEADERSHIP?

In the Jewish community, the concept of leadership often conjures thoughts of professional development, management training, or the relationship between lay leaders and professionals. What is often lost is the larger question of what constitutes genuine leadership, and what attributes the Jewish community needs in its leaders.

What exactly is leadership? Why do Jewish movements, both historically and in contemporary times, often rely on charismatic individuals as agents of change? Are individual leaders necessary to propel movements into motion, and if so, what qualities of leadership are both effective and consistent with Jewish values? How much is leadership defined solely by management skills, and to what degree does it rely on the ability to articulate and embody a vision that will inspire the community? Finally, does leadership come with negative aspects that are sometimes overlooked in the community's search for guiding lights? What can we do to safeguard against the kinds of abuse that are frequently linked to leadership abilities?

This issue of CONTACT explores leadership from a wide variety of angles. Throughout, the goal is to identify the attributes that might help the community steer a course of cultural and communal renaissance. From definitions of good and bad leadership to analyses of how the community might recruit leaders from less represented groups, the articles here present a compelling portrait of the needs, challenges and potentials of Jewish leadership today.

Eli Valley
Eli Valley

Only by investing significantly
in Jewish life today will we
be able to nurture the leaders
of tomorrow.

On **Leadership,** **Vision** and **Ideas**

by MICHAEL H. STEINHARDT

In an earlier era of American Jewish life, we knew who our leaders were. It was possible to identify people such as Louis Brandeis or Abba Hillel Silver as our visionaries — people who expressed our common aspirations, and who helped guide us into an uncertain future.

These days, is it possible to identify even a single leader who commands such influence?

One might point weakly to Federation executives, philanthropists, perhaps a rabbi or two. But nobody comes close to the stature of Jewish leaders in previous generations.

I wonder why this might be. Partly it's due to the increasingly fractious nature of the Jewish community. Partly it's a natural reflection of Jewish assimilation and the diminishing ties many Jews feel to community. It's also a signifier of our success: After the barriers to mainstream American culture were knocked down, we no longer shared an overarching domestic agenda to rally around. As a result, our need for unifying leaders declined commensurately.

And yet, one might argue that in an age of attenuating connections and rampant assimilation, we need visionary leadership more than ever. The difference is that for today's community, which lacks a clearly defined agenda, leadership is more difficult to identify and to nourish. It is at once more complicated and more nuanced than in past periods of American Jewish life.

To be sure, we aren't lacking for self-appointed leaders. This is an era in which countless people claim to speak for the American Jewish community and for the Jewish people in general. It seems that every month, we hear of a new leadership conference run by leaders, attended by leaders and funded by leaders. Our problem is a lack of *genuine* Jewish leadership. We need leaders who are not in it for the accolades, but who are willing to put in the time and resources to effect visionary change. There's a big difference between

those who are only interested in having their egos stroked and those who see a problem and want to make a change.

What is true leadership? It involves creativity, ingenuity and a willingness to challenge the status quo in the interest of progress towards a larger goal. For our purposes, we can identify the larger goal as an end to the decline in Jewish interest, literacy and commitment, and the beginning of a renaissance in American Jewish life.

Birthright Israel is a good example. When it was established, community leaders in America and Israel were skeptical at best. They refused to accept a radically different way of inculcating identity. They felt that trips to Israel were not a priority for community investment, and that the impact of the trips would be negligible. Today, you would be hard-pressed to find a negative assessment of the program. Birthright Israel worked because it involved unpopular risk-taking in the service of the concrete goal of shoring up Jewish identity and connecting young adults to Israel. Without the vision of its early leaders and their willingness to buck the pessimists and nay-sayers, Birthright Israel would never have emerged from the pipe-dream phase.

But leadership is not just a matter of steadfast will. It is also a matter of vision. In the end, the dearth of genuine Jewish leadership in America is connected to a profound lack of vision. When we look back at the eras of Louis Brandeis or Abba Hillel Silver, it's hard to miss the central facet of their leadership: Zionism. Both men were connected to an enterprise that represented a historic opportunity and that touched on the greatest aspirations of the Jewish people of their time. These days, it's difficult to identify a vision that is as compelling as Zionism was in its early days. This is understandable, as the effort to establish a Jewish state has been accomplished. And yet, without a revolutionary new idea that captures the spirit and imagination of the Jewish people, leadership will continue to be nothing more than an empty ceremonial position.

Where, then, are the great new ideas

that might galvanize our community and bring about a new wave of Jewish leadership? There is no easy answer — the lack of leadership has only exacerbated the problem of our lack of ideas. For now, our best hope is to continue finding new ways of strengthening Jewish identity and educating the next generation on the joys of Jewish living. We must reexamine our synagogues, which in the non-Orthodox world are mostly empty both physically and spiritually. We must also revisit Jewish education in the non-Orthodox world in America. It's mostly a *shonda*, and, even with a few promising experiments, so little has impacted it.

Ultimately, we should insist on accountability. How, for instance, can the leaders of the movements allow the creation of generation after generation of undereducated, uninvolved Jews? Aren't we the People of the Book? The community should demand an ombudsman to monitor the activities of those who run all Jewish organizations. In my view, the record of achievement in the Jewish institutional world is appalling. But perhaps that is too strong an assessment, because indeed there is no record — neither financially nor, more important, substantively. Self-congratulatory advertisements in Jewish or friendly secular publications do not count. We need to be assured that our constituents are truly represented in our institutions. I believe too often they are not. Until we transform our organizations into vehicles of rigorous education and celebration, we will continue to flail about in our efforts to effect real, tangible change in the community.

All of this requires leadership. One hopes that new leaders will emerge — people whose boldness of vision is matched by the ingenuity of their ideas. Only by investing significantly in Jewish life today will we be able to nurture the leaders of tomorrow. This alone is reason for a rededication to Jewish philanthropy: we must do all we can to create the conditions for the emergence of new ideas, new leaders and a revived future. ■

Michael H. Steinhardt is Chairman of the Steinhardt Foundation for Jewish Life.

I often hear complaints that there are not enough young leaders in the Jewish world. These outcries are filled with a sense of urgency and fear for the future of the Jewish people.

While a crisis of leadership would truly be a cause for concern, I believe that the solution for this perceived

Accidental Leadership

by ADAM BRONFMAN

I BECAME A LEADER simply by accident when I stood up to fight for what I believed.

problem is closer than we think. We have powerful models of leadership in our tradition to which we can turn to inspire a new generation of Jewish leadership.

True Jewish leadership is rarely, if ever, defined as such except in hindsight. Even Moses' career was characterized by conflict with those he led and by challenges to his leadership. Like many leaders, Moses was at first reluctant and unsure of himself. Today we look back through the prism of time and see a great leader, but it was not so clear during his life.

In my lifetime, I have learned much through the example of my father, Edgar Bronfman. As a leader, he chose to take on challenges due to his belief that one must leave the world a better place than one finds it. Hindsight tells us that my father was right in each instance, but it was not so clear during the battles he waged. When fighting for the freedom of the Jews in the Soviet Union, there was fear that conditions there would worsen. In his work exposing Kurt Waldheim's

Nazi past, concern arose regarding increased anti-Jewish fervor. My father's battle with the Swiss banks was challenged by those who believed that there was no cause for legal redress against such powerful financial institutions. Guided by his internal moral compass and personal family history, he persevered even in the face of many who disagreed with him. Based on my father's example, my own work in the Jewish philanthropic world has been founded in a deep belief that we can make this world a better place.

Long before I started working with my father, I advocated for an open and welcoming Jewish community for all. My work started in Santa Barbara, CA and Park City, UT, where I chose to help with the work of building and strengthening those Jewish communities based on glaring needs. In both places, there was a great yearning for Jewish life. It either did not exist, as was the case in Park City, or it was inadequate for the needs of the community, as was the case in Santa Barbara.

In Park City, our community has done astonishing work. I expressed my deep conviction that our area needed a spiritual leader, one who would fight for the same welcoming and open atmosphere in which I strongly believe. I volunteered my time, my opinion and my money to advocate for our rabbi, and subsequently for the building of a synagogue campus that welcomes all. There were many doubters. Most did not believe that our experiment would work. Now, our building is complete, our community welcomes all and we are thriving. We frequently have over 100 people attending Friday night services, we celebrate a Bar or Bat Mitzvah almost every week, and our other programs are repeatedly over-subscribed.

I became a leader simply by accident when I stood up to fight for what I believed. Like many of the people in these communities, I am intermarried and yearn for meaning in my life. Like them, I want to belong to a group and to transmit a rich tradition to my children. Taking leadership was not something I sought or anticipated. It came

from working with my neighbors. It came from understanding the needs and concerns of the community in which I established my home. It came from doing what felt very natural, which is stepping up and helping out. In inspiring a new generation, it is important to teach that anyone can become a leader. It doesn't require superhuman strength; it simply requires dedicated commitment and a willingness to act on one's beliefs.

In our increasingly complicated world, it is often difficult to know exactly how to be an effective Jewish leader. Certain elements of leadership, however, remain essential regardless of the era. People tend to follow those who have a meaningful message and to admire leaders who are willing to take a stand based on principle. Effective leaders are individuals who help others feel a sense of belonging to a greater whole and who empower the members of their community to contribute to a greater good.

I believe that expressions of concern about the future of Jewish leadership are, in many ways, a fear of the unknown and a reluctance to disturb the status quo. I hope to send a message that assuages that fear. The message is simply that as leaders, we must listen to the people who look up to us and establish a personal connection with them. We must acknowledge our changing demographics and the changing realities facing our people, and we must break down the barriers to inclusion and embrace the intermarried and their children. Judaism belongs to those who are searching for it. We must align ourselves with those who are invested in "big tent Judaism" and welcome all who choose to enter that tent.

By opening the doors, our people will grow with a newfound sense of self-respect and respect for others. If we can accomplish this, our ideas will become stronger, and our people will attain a greater sense of belonging and meaning. Young people will be willing to stand up for a Judaism they believe in and will feel inspired to become leaders within their community. By addressing our challenges directly, the notion that we are facing a crisis of leadership will disappear and, almost by accident, we will become a people of innovators and leaders. ■

Adam Bronfman is Managing Director of The Samuel Bronfman Foundation.

ON CHARISMA AND JEWISH LEADERSHIP

by RABBI JILL JACOBS

What makes a great Jewish leader? Two very different examples may give us some clues.

In the 3rd Century CE, Rabbi Yochanan bar Nafcha was said to be so beautiful that he literally shone. In one Talmudic story, Rabbi Yochanan boasted to his fellow rabbis about his effect on women:

Rabbi Yochanan would go and sit at the gates of the women's bathhouse. He said, "when the daughters of Jerusalem come out from their immersion, it is a mitzvah for them to encounter me, so that they will have sons as beautiful as me, and as learned in Torah as me." The rabbis said to him, "Are you not afraid of the evil eye?" He responded, "I am from the seed of Joseph, and the evil eye has no power over me." (*Bava Metziah* 84a)

Rabbi Yochanan exemplified the charismatic leader who capitalized on his seductive appeal to propagate his own teachings. In this case, Rabbi Yochanan used his possibly supernatural powers to produce a generation of beautiful and brilliant children to follow in his footsteps. He judged himself a successful leader because he raised the next generation to be just like him.

In the 2nd Century CE, an earlier Talmudic leader, Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah, took a different approach. When Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah replaced Rabban Gamliel as head of the *beit midrash* (study house), he suspended Rabban Gamliel's rules restricting access to the *beit midrash* to only the most elite students. As his first act of leadership, Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah removed the doorkeeper who would keep out students who did not meet Rabban Gamliel's scholarly standards. Between 400 and 700 benches were added to the *beit midrash* to accommodate the waves of new students who seized the opportunity to study. Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah's unexpected decision paid off: On the day that the *beit midrash* was opened to the masses, the Talmud says, the most difficult legal problems were solved.

The Talmud suggests that had he chosen to do so, Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah could have led by his charisma alone. He is described as a prodigy who, at eighteen, was

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already sufficiently wise and wealthy to step into a position of leadership. God is said to have performed miracles for him, including turning his hair grey on the occasion of his appointment to leadership.

The difference between Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah is that Rabbi Yochanan used his power to garner more attention to himself and to create leaders who

Hasidim taught us new ways of envisioning God and of living passionate Jewish lives. Early leaders of the Zionist and labor movements used fiery speeches and the force of personality to change the course of Jewish history.

At times, though, reliance on charismatic leaders has led to tragedy or heartbreak. Most infamously, in the 17th Century, Shabbatai Zvi persuaded entire communities of Jews that he was

THE VERY qualities that instill such a leader with power can easily be used for negative effect. Those leaders blessed with charisma have the responsibility to maintain appropriate boundaries.



were just like him, whereas Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah used his power to open leadership to the masses. The Rabbi Yochanan story leaves us thinking about the radiance of a gifted leader; the other story leaves us thinking about the power of the entire community.

For most of Jewish history, the model of the charismatic leader prevailed. Despite Rabbi Elazar's efforts, the Talmudic rabbis generally opened leadership only to a select few, considering the masses untrustworthy in many matters of religious practice. Much later, the mystical tradition produced charismatic leaders such as the 16th Century's Isaac Luria, who created a tight, elite circle around him. Not surprisingly, members of this circle competed for proximity to their leader. Hasidic communities, which form around a *Tzaddik*, or Rebbe, directly follow in the path of these mystical circles. The most charismatic leaders are often believed to have magical powers, and stories abound about their abilities to heal, to communicate with animals and to have special access to God.

To be sure, charismatic leaders have transformed Jewish life and the Jewish community. Luria and the early

the Messiah. More recently, a few heavily publicized cases of rabbinic sexual scandals have reminded us that even the most trusted leaders are fallible.

As many Jews have become disillusioned with charismatic leadership, more egalitarian models have emerged. Feminism has challenged the "man on the *bima*" style of rabbinic leadership, and many women rabbis have worked to create a new model of rabbinic authority. Both male and female rabbis are currently experimenting with more facilitative modes of leadership. Some rabbis replace sermons with Torah discussions, train lay leaders to lead worship, or facilitate conversations among congregants about issues ranging from social justice to prayer practices. The Reconstructionist Movement has made community participation its hallmark. The emergence of independent *minyanim* (prayer communities) has also opened religious leadership to many without formal backgrounds. The rise of congregation-based community organizing, a means of social justice work that begins with conversations among a broad swath of congregational membership, has broadened the pool of community leaders. And across the board, the interest of young people in

do-it-yourself Judaism has reduced reliance on religious leaders.

In general, these new models follow Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah's example: the role of leadership is to cultivate the leadership abilities of other members of the community. Jewish organizations as well as rabbis have heard this call. Jewish Funds for Justice offers classes at most of the major rabbinical seminaries in which students learn a style of leadership that prioritizes listening to community members, developing leadership from within the ranks, and mobilizing this new leadership to take actions in areas of communal concern. Jewish Funds for Justice's Selah Leadership Program helps those working both within the Jewish community and in the general social justice community to cultivate a leadership style based on emotional intelligence rather than charisma. The Wexner Heritage program is designed to help lay people learn more about Judaism and to expand their leadership skills. Mechon Hadar helps independent prayer communities to take charge of their own religious experiences. These new models are already producing leaders who see the cultivation of other leaders as a major part of their communal responsibilities.

Charisma can be an invaluable leadership tool. A charismatic leader can persuade a community to take risks, to explore new ideas or to try out new modes of practice. But the very qualities that instill such a leader with power can easily be used for negative effect. Those leaders blessed with charisma have the responsibility to maintain appropriate boundaries. The community, in turn, has a responsibility to foster a culture that does not revolve only around the personality of its leader, but that can collectively cultivate the next generation to become leaders when the time is right.

When we as Jews choose our leaders, we might challenge ourselves to seek out individuals like Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah. Such people may or may not exhibit charisma, but they inspire and guide members of the community to become leaders in their own right. ■

On JEWISH Leadership

by ROBERT P. ARONSON

After more than thirty years in Jewish service, I can now report the three expressions I dread most:

1. “I want to give you a heads-up.” This means “I want to give you some really bad news.” I would rather hear bad news than have to prepare for it. It’s sort of like that old Jewish joke: “Start worrying, details to follow.”
2. “Low-hanging fruit.” I suppose this is a Biblical expression meaning “That which is easiest to accomplish.” My view is that there are no “low-hanging fruit” in Jewish life, although maybe there were in Biblical times.
3. “Jewish Leadership.” This is the worst of all, because everyone is a self-anointed Jewish leader. In the Federation world, that’s how we refer to all volunteers — as leaders. We have young leadership groups, lay leaders, national leaders, mega-leaders and everything in between. It is the most over-used word I know. Jehuda Reinharz, President of Brandeis University, is fond of saying that any applicant who describes him/herself as a “follower” will be immediately accepted for admission.

The irony is that while we use the term “Jewish Leader” indiscriminately, there is a broadly-held view that in North America we have few if any real Jewish leaders who are making a genuine impact on Jewish life.

I have worked with many generous, well-intentioned people over the years. They are dedicated to their volunteer roles and anxious to please others. But these qualities alone do not define leadership. I have also worked with those who are consumed with the “I” complex. It is all about them. This kind of volunteer, taken with ego and the need for power, does not last long in a Jewish

organizational setting. People around them may call them leaders, but in the end they take their marbles and go home.

I have also been fortunate in my life to be mentored by true Jewish leaders who shaped my understanding of people who lead by example.

There are many great books about leadership, none of which I have read. I learned on the job and in the trenches. To define true Jewish leadership I turn to my long relationships with two of the greats — Marty Stein of Milwaukee ז”ל and Max Fisher of Detroit ז”ל.

Their leadership styles were very different: Marty didn’t mind making waves to create change, and Max always preferred to remain behind the scenes. But between them, I learned fundamental, eternal principles which I believe define great Jewish leadership.

Among these principles are the following:

1. People lead by exhibiting moral and ethical values in their behavior and interactions with others.
A common theme in leadership is setting a personal example. In Jewish life there are no secrets. We often operate in a world of rumor, innuendo and back stabbing. It is easy to give in to these temptations. True leaders do not. Throughout their lives, both Marty and Max faced tough personal challenges, but they also valued and understood the example they set for others. They made their decisions in full awareness of their status as role models in the community.
2. Leaders have a passion for the entire Jewish People and Judaic knowledge, which drives their behavior and decision making.
Marty Stein was a deeply religious man whose beliefs led him to a lifetime of service both to Jewish and to general communities. He did not judge his fellow Jews, regardless of affiliation.

Max’s religion was a belief in Jewish Peoplehood and the State of

Israel, and yet one of his proudest accomplishments was inviting the Orthodox day-school world into the then-resistant secular world of the Federation. He believed above all in Jewish unity.

3. “When you lead your troops into battle, look back and make sure they’re following you.”
This was a favorite expression of Max’s. It sums up a crucial notion of leadership. Value the opinions of others and make sure they are part of the decision-making process. To put it simply, motivate and inspire others before getting too far in front of them.
4. “True power means never using it.”
This was Max’s and Marty’s view of the world. It means that real leadership lies in empowering others to become involved. A real Jewish leader does not issue ultimatums and does not threaten to exploit his/her influence in decision making. Max, for instance, remained skeptical about the merger of his beloved United Jewish Appeal with the Council of Jewish Federations to create a single national organization. He went along with it because he felt that this was the consensus of opinion. He knew that if he personally spoke out against the merger, he would become “the issue.” Above all, he resisted that.

Ultimately, a genuine Jewish leader is hard to find. I have been fortunate to witness the real thing, and hopefully I have taught this model to others. Are real leaders born or taught? I believe it is a little of both. The crucible of Jewish leadership has elevated some, as was the case with Marty and Max, and it has degraded others. We need personal examples in the hard work of building Jewish community in North America. My hope is that we will set the bar even higher, and through our efforts train a new generation of young Jews who will set a new standard of Jewish leadership. ■

Robert P. Aronson is President of The Steinhardt Foundation for Jewish Life.



Leadership Attributes that **MATTER**

by RABBI JOSHUA ELKIN

IT IS SIGNIFICANT that both a general empirical study as well as a Jewish text-based study agree on the central role of character; they even define character quite similarly.

A Google search on “Leadership” reveals 188 million entries. We are inundated with books and articles on the topic. To be sure, leadership is an essential component for the advancement of any human endeavor, and the Jewish communal world is no exception. But how can we distill from this overabundance of materials the most valuable insights for our Jewish organizational needs?

One of my most influential teachers, Dwayne Huebner, then of Columbia Teachers College, taught me that delving into my own tradition is often more likely to yield authentic, powerful and relevant insights than embracing the latest notion of leadership. In that spirit, I look to the Hebrew word for leader — *manhig*, which shares the same root as *minhag*, meaning custom or practice. This shared root illumi-

nates our understanding of leadership. It is not about title, station or office, but about practice and behavior. What do leaders actually *do*? How is a leader supposed to behave?

In John H. Zenger’s and Joseph Folkman’s *The Extraordinary Leader* (New York, 2002), the authors report on 25,000 leaders who were evaluated by over 200,000 observing employees. The researchers define four key components of the “leadership tent”: Leaders focus on results; they have personal capability; they lead organizational change; and they have strong interpersonal skills. But a fifth trait proves to be the central pole of the tent that holds up the entire structure. That component is character.

The authors define character as including such behaviors as being tenacious, keeping commitments, treating everyone equally, never being arrogant, addressing all with dignity and being approachable by anyone.

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Does this research resonate at all with Jewish perspectives? What does our tradition say about leadership and character? In *From Sanctuary to Boardroom: A Jewish Approach to Leadership* (Lanham, MD, 2006), Hal Lewis also focuses on character as a fundamental component of leadership. In addition to the crucial trait of competence, Lewis articulates a set of behaviors based on Jewish texts that comprise what we know as character. Lewis cites six behaviors, rooted in Jewish texts, that are fundamental components of character and that effective leaders must cultivate and master. They are piety, tenacity, compassion, service to followers, humility, and consistency and fairness. It should be noted that Lewis's reference to piety can be misleading in that it suggests overtly religious behavior. He defines it, however, as "the need to stand for something greater than yourself or your organization," and he describes pious leaders as "committed to building a communal system in which human power is circumscribed and shared."

Overall, these are a challenging array of traits, made all the more daunting by the requirements that one must combine them with competence. However, Lewis offers the optimistic view that the behaviors can be learned and strengthened. He thereby debunks the notion that leaders are simply born that way. We must redouble our efforts to ensure that these leadership behaviors flourish within every Jewish institution.

It is significant that both a general empirical study as well as a Jewish text-based study agree on the central role of character; they even define character quite similarly. This substantial consensus on the primacy of character affords us the opportunity to draw insights into Jewish communal leadership through different lenses.

1. Ethics are foundational. A focus on character helps to keep the ethical dimension of leadership in the foreground. By adhering to and practicing behaviors associated with character,

leaders maintain and enhance their integrity and credibility. They help keep their institutions above reproach in an era in which so many have come under fire.

2. Character and its associated behaviors are the province of all. A focus on character and its defining components does not limit the leadership message only to those who hold particular positions or titles. The messages from both Zenger/Folkman and from Lewis are applicable to a wide range of volunteer and professional leaders across the spectrum of Jewish communal organizations. Everyone, by his/her actions and behaviors, either enhances or detracts from the character quotients of the organization. Though Lewis's six components are by no means a substitute for the traditional importance of goal setting and work plans, the shared responsibilities represent a powerful opportunity to distribute effective leadership widely. The notion of distributed or shared leadership is gaining recognition in educational and business settings alike.

Distributing tasks is one surface dimension of shared leadership; however, embracing together a set of traits associated with character may potentially contribute to the forging of a special shared foundation upon which the more task-oriented work can proceed.

3. Professional and volunteer leadership must be a team. Anyone familiar with Jewish communal life — or even with general non-profit management — has stories about the tensions that all too often exist between an organization's board chair (or Board) and its professional leader. The reasons for this painful reality are many: lack of role clarity; changes in senior leadership, stresses on the organization with a proclivity to distribute blame; and failure to create a culture of ongoing and routine reflection and evaluation. We find too much reactivity to the immediate challenge of the day. How can a focus on character be helpful?

Beyond recommending a routine annual review of performance (based

on previously established goals) for both the Board and for the top professional, the addition of a joint, reflective examination of progress on the six traits associated with character could prove to be highly constructive and healthy for any organization. Instead of bickering over who made a particular mistake in the implementation of a new program, volunteers and professionals alike could jointly review a year's progress on tenacity to goals, service to constituents and fairness. Such conversation could strengthen the volunteer-professional bond and possibly help to alleviate the tension and the strain which often lead to blowups and unexpected leadership transitions on the professional and/or volunteer side of the partnership. Such sudden transitions sap energy from an organization and slow momentum toward the achievement of agreed-upon goals.

4. The search for and induction of new leaders must incorporate character. The search for volunteer and professional leaders is one of the most time-consuming and difficult tasks that any Jewish or general non-profit must take on. The dearth of leaders is a story unto itself. However, the priority given to character and its accompanying traits provides new areas to focus on and to inquire about as candidates for leadership positions are sought out, interviewed and potentially hired. These components of character can also prove to be valuable additions to the set of annual goals for any Jewish organizational leadership, both as new leaders are brought on as well as for more established leaders.

Imagine a Jewish communal ecology filled with leaders who model these various components of character. Not only would the work of leadership be accomplished, but volunteers and professionals alike would serve as role models to their followers and to each other. They would thereby expand the presence of character in the act of leadership, and in the Jewish community as a whole. ■

FOCUSING ON THE PINTELE YID

by RABBI HERSHEY NOVACK and RABBI DOV WAGNER

As campus rabbis serving American universities, we both lead constituencies not prone to following. Today's young people and academics are often alienated from institutional leadership. They're confident and they feel empowered to celebrate their individuality. We are regularly confronted with a conundrum: how to effectively lead a diverse group of individuals, each with his or her own *weltanschauung*, while retaining a firm commitment to our own values.

Leadership can be defined as “the ability to get people to follow voluntarily.” Is there a model of leadership that allows people to be engaged participants without compelling them to automatically agree with their leaders?

A model of Jewish leadership can be found in the life of Moses. Moses led a people almost eternally conflicted. They complained about water, they complained about bread, they complained about meat. They complained about his efforts to take them out of Egypt, and they complained about the land towards which he was leading them. They complained about Moses' personal life — the Talmud relates that whenever he dealt with the Temple's finances, Moses would wear clothing bearing neither pockets nor cuffs, to avoid suspicion of pilfering (which incidentally is a lesson for public leaders).

Yet Moses remained dedicated to each member of his flock. Moses proclaimed the people of Israel — all the people — to be “the people I am among” (*Num. 11:21*). Biblical commentaries interpret this as an endearment; Moses considered each member of his community as critical. This includes such rebels as Korach, Datan and Aviram, and so many others who would challenge Moses at every turn. We learn that a critical measure of a Jewish leader is her/his ability to value each individual as integral to the complete whole of *Klal Yisrael* despite their differences with — or even challenges to — the leader.

Similarly, when Moses prepares to seek a successor, he asks “the G-d of spirits of all flesh” to appoint one (*Num. 27:16*). The classical commentator Rashi explains the unusual reference to “G-d of the spirits” as follows: “Master of the Universe. Before You is revealed and known the mind and spirit of each individual, and no two are alike. Appoint for them a leader who will tolerate each person according to their individual character.” Leadership, according to this rendering, does not mean merely to seek out those who agree. On the contrary, its defining quality is the ability to include others who disagree as part of the community.

No doubt Moses had an ideal goal in mind for the Jewish people. How then could Moses — and for that matter Jewish leaders today — effectively connect with and lead people of all stripes, even those who don't accept the ideals of the leader? The answer may be understood from the teachings of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812).

In his foundational work of Chabad Chasidic philosophy, the *Tanya* (*chap. 32*), Rabbi Zalman posits that true *Ahavat Yisrael* (care and concern for a fellow) can best be achieved by relating to the internal qualities that each person shares — their “*Pintele Yid*,” or “Jewish spark.” When looking at other people through the prism of the physical — body or mind — it is impossible to perfectly care for the other as oneself. Our physical bodies are different and in a sense contradictory. Only in terms of the soul — the *Neshama* — is there a shared reality that unites every person and which transcends differing mindsets and ideals.

By focusing on our shared commonality, Moses — and each of us — can recognize that every individual is vitally important whether one chooses to agree with one's leader or not. This model allows us to recognize the goodness represented by people of all mindsets and approaches.

From our own perspectives as campus rabbis, two other practical results emerge from this approach. First, it changes the nature of the relationship between campus rabbi and student, creating a mutually beneficial interaction rather than a hierarchical one. Second, it allows for true

concern for the student's entire being — including personal and scholastic identities — rather than a limited focus solely on the student's Jewish activity and engagement.

We can identify this model of leadership in the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of blessed memory. It is outside the scope of this article to analyze this theme in the Rebbe's teachings, and we would be accused of hagiography. To share one person's experience, though:

A second-year university student from England related his impressions after he visited with the Rebbe during the 1960s. “[The Rebbe's] leadership — rare almost to the point of uniqueness in the present day — consists in self-effacement. Its power is precisely what it effaces itself towards — the sense of the irreplaceability of each and every Jew.” The student, Sir Jonathan Sacks, later became Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. In another article, Rabbi Sacks put it this way: “[P]eople had profoundly misunderstood him. They thought that the Rebbe was interested in creating followers. He wasn't. He was interested in creating leaders. That was his greatness. He believed in people more than they believed in themselves.”

Rabbi Sacks saw the Rebbe as looking at the innate possibility and reality of every person. From this perspective, leadership is no longer defined as creating followers; leadership is about revealing the latent potential within.

This encapsulates our vision on campus as Chabad Lubavitch rabbis: we believe it is crucial to recognize that we are all cut from the same fabric and what binds us together is more important and eternal than that which divides us. And, equally important, we don't see our leadership as changing our students into something they are not. Rather, we view our role as both teaching, and yes, learning from our students, while providing them with tools — material, intellectual and spiritual — to develop into literate and participatory Jews. This allows for each person to experience their own journey: one guided by the faith and traditions of our heritage, yet colored by their individual natures.

We find it possible to lead a diverse group of individuals without compromising our own values because we choose to focus on the *Pintele Yid*. This mindset allows for the leadership balance we seek, a balance that so many of our young friends respond to: a clear moral and spiritual voice, coupled with an environment and attitude that is truly welcoming. ■

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GEN Y AND LEADERSHIP

by RHODA A. WEISMAN and SARA MYERS ALLEN

“Are you free to talk? I want your advice on a new leadership project. I’m ready for something huge.”

“I’m tired of working without a purpose. I’m thinking about changing careers and working in the Jewish community.”

“I’ve only been out of school for a few years, but this Exec job came up and I really want to go for it. Do you think I have a chance?”

NextGen Jews nationwide are knocking down our doors to take on leadership positions. Yes, it’s a miracle. Yes, it couldn’t have come at a more critical time. With decreasing numbers and aging leadership in the organized Jewish community, now is the time for the next generation of leaders to step up — and for our community to make room for them.

The Evolution of Leadership — “L’dor Vador”

Every generation’s leadership approach is shaped by societal and cultural influences. Boomers came of age in an era that valued process, stability and “paying one’s dues.” By contrast, Gen Y grew up with the rapid pace of technology, which made the impossible possible. Their parents’ involvement and praise sparked in them an entrepreneurial spirit and a sense of unrelenting optimism and hopefulness.

How is This Generation of Leaders Different?

1. They Seek Jewish Meaning: NextGen leaders are searching for passion, meaning and purpose. They want everything in all that they do. This generation believes that *Happiness* (much like their first trip to Israel) is a birthright. They strive to integrate deeper Jewish meaning in their careers and volunteer work. They are careful to balance their leadership with meaningful personal lives.

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2. They Are Individual Achievers, and Good Team Players: Where Boomers are often hierarchical, members of Gen Y value partnership. They grew up playing team sports, in diverse neighborhoods, and they feed off the energy and power of collaboration. Their confidence empowers them to demand a seat at the table, on equal footing with seasoned leaders. Without decision-making power in our Jewish community, they will lose interest.

3. Their Turn is Now: The young adults of Gen Y are impatient with process and don’t want to “wait their turn” or “pay dues.” Instead, they believe that they bring invaluable skills and abilities, and are impatient with the bureaucracy they see in the organized Jewish world.

4. They Seek Wisdom From Others: Our rabbinic tradition asks “Who is wise? Those who learn from others.” Over 3,000 years later, this still holds true — especially with members of Gen Y, who embrace mentors as sources of wisdom and connections. Their open nature means that they see the value of acquiring knowledge from everyone they meet, and they succeed at assembling diverse “personal boards” of advisors.

Bridging our Community’s Leadership Divide

By understanding Gen Y’s leadership approach, we can create a fast-paced and meaningful environment in which it will thrive. The community should therefore work to:

1. Infuse Jewish Values: By sharing the Jewish values and principles upon which our organizations were built, we will help members of Gen Y see the connection between their leadership and a deeper meaning. By tying our community’s needs back to our Jewish tradition, we will create a culture of education and inspiration.

2. Flatten the Hierarchy: Gen Y believes that everyone can offer something of value. Leaders must foster a Jewish cul-

ture in which people continually share their knowledge. We should work to create possibilities for reciprocal mentoring that allows experienced leaders to hand down their enormous knowledge and empowers NextGen to teach seasoned leaders at the same time. Gen Y thrives with individual, one-to-one mentors and coaches who look at their leadership as one aspect of their holistic selves. In turn, they see that they are a link in the chain, and they will turn around and teach those who come after them.

3. Let Them Take Risks: NextGenners are comfortable with risk-taking and know that even through failure, they can learn. We should help them take ownership of their ideas by giving them real power (both decision-making and financial). They won’t be shut out — decades of talk shows and reality TV make them believe that everyone has a voice.

4. Never Stop Growing: Gen Y wants to keep growing — in skills, knowledge, responsibility and spirituality. They need safe spaces where they can test out new ideas, and a self-reflective environment where they can review their mistakes and successes. Our world looks completely different to them, and we need to provide creative room so NextGenners can be entrepreneurial or intra-preneurial in building a new world. Organizations that don’t allow this will not attract or keep this new talent.

Together We Will Reimagine Jewish Life

Gen Y’s optimism drives it to improve Jewish life through its courage to think in endless possibilities — and to act upon them. This population has the entire world at its fingertips — the whole Earth, the endless possibilities of space and the virtual reality of cyberspace.

And yet, these young adults are deeply connected to the 3,000-year-old history of the Jewish people, a people who have thrived on change and creativity. This is only the beginning. There are worlds of possibilities before us. Let’s work together to reimagine Jewish life. ■



Moral **Character** and Dilemmas in **Leadership**

BY RABBI ELLIOT N. DORFF

Moral Character Leadership demands personal traits that leaders call upon in the many roles they play, especially in crisis situations and in contexts that demand moral judgment. Moreover, such traits are often the reason why people are willing to follow their leader.

The Torah spells this out early on. When Jethro convinces Moses to appoint judges so that he need not judge every case, Jethro says: “You shall seek out from among all the people capable men who fear God, trustworthy men who spurn ill-gotten gain” (Exo-

dus 18:21). Later, when Moses articulates this to the People of Israel as his instruction for generations to come, he creates his own list:

Pick from each of your tribes men who are wise, discerning, and experienced, and I will appoint them as your heads... I further charged your magistrates as follows: “Hear out your fellow men, and decide justly between any man and a fellow Israelite or a stranger. You shall not be partial in judgment: hear out high and low alike. Fear no man, for judgment is God’s...” (Deuteronomy 1:13, 16-17).

The Rabbis of the Talmud expanded on these lists. As Maimonides summarized, judges of any court must have seven characteristics: “wisdom, humility,

fear [of God and of sin], hatred of money, love of the truth, love of one’s fellow humans, and possessors of a good reputation” (Mishneh Torah [=M.T.], Laws of Courts [Sanhedrin] 2:7). In addition, judges of appellate courts need to be “wise and discerning, excelling in the wisdom of the Torah and in their knowledge of it, knowing something about other sources of wisdom, such as medicine, mathematics, astronomy, and sorcery so that they can judge cases regarding them.” (M.T. Laws of Courts 2:1) In addition, an appellate judge has to be a parent “so that he will be merciful” (M.T. Laws of Courts 2:3), on the grounds that only those who have had children of their own can recognize the value of the lives of the litigants and, in criminal cases, the lives the defendants are accused of harming.

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That is the ideal. However, when we look at the Bible's record of actual leaders, the stories describe people who are anything but ideal. Instead, the Bible, to its credit, portrays leaders with many faults. King David, who expanded the borders of Israel to their largest domain and who, according to tradition, created some of our Psalms, also arranged to have Batsheva's husband killed in battle so that he could marry her (2 Samuel 11-12). Even Moses, whom the Rabbis later deemed "our teacher" (*rabbenu*), hit a rock to bring forth water, rather than speaking to it as instructed by God. Thus, he transferred credit for the water from God to himself. For that act he did not merit entering the Promised Land (Numbers 20:1-13; Deuteronomy 5:23-28). The Bible thus tells us that while we should definitely seek people of moral integrity for our leaders, it is unrealistic to expect moral perfection. Rather, we should seek people whose moral strengths are particularly relevant to the leadership positions in question and whose weaknesses are not likely to affect their performance in those roles. (I discuss the traits of leadership more extensively in "Jewish Models of Leadership," in Richard J. Mouw and Eric O. Jacobsen, eds., *Traditions in Leadership: How Faith Traditions Shape the Way We Lead*, Pasadena, CA, 2006).

Moral Dilemmas in Leadership: The Example of the Tainted Gift

Often the issues in leadership are not obvious ones — avoiding bribery, misusing power, embezzling money, etc. — but rather the ability to determine the best course when it is not clear. That is why a critical leadership trait that appears in the Torah and in all succeeding Jewish lists of leadership qualities is the ability to be discerning. One must know not only what is right and wrong in general; one must also be able to determine the right course — both practically and morally — when, as is often the case, there are competing values at stake. I have actually encountered an example of this in my roles as President of Jewish Family Service of

Los Angeles and as a rabbi advising institutions as to what to do in morally sticky circumstances. (I discuss this and other moral dilemmas more extensively in "Nonprofits and Morals: Jewish Perspectives and Methods for Resolving Some Commonly Occurring Moral Issues," in David H. Smith, ed., *Good Intentions: Moral Obstacles and Opportunities*, Bloomington, IN, 2005).

Non-profit institutions such as synagogues, schools, camps, Jewish Family Services and Jewish Federations depend heavily on contributions to do their good work. What happens, though, when major donors have come under indictment? What if they have been convicted? Must the institution return the money donated by such people? Should their names be removed from the facilities funded by their donations? May the institution take additional money from them? What if the money is not theirs alone but is part of a family endowment? What if a person has paid whatever fines the courts have imposed and even served time in prison and now wants to donate money as part of his or her atonement (*teshuvah*, literally, "return" to the good graces of God and the Jewish community)?

Jewish law, as you might imagine, prizes donations to Jewish education and to social service agencies, but the Torah bans accepting "the fee of a whore or the pay of a dog [a male prostitute]" for the Temple (Deuteronomy 23:19), and the Rabbis establish the principle that "a sinner should not be rewarded" for his sin either monetarily or through public honors (B. *Ketubbot* 11a, 36b, 39b, etc.). On the other hand, Jewish law is equally insistent that we not embarrass people in public, especially innocent members of the felon's family, and it believes strongly in the power of *teshuvah*. So, for example, although many American states require former convicts to register as such in job applications and ban them from voting, Jewish law maintains that it is actually a sin to mention the former person's crime unless it is required for some practical purpose (Mishnah, *Bava Metzia* 4:10 and the Talmud thereon).

Furthermore, money accepted in all innocence need not be returned, but once a person is convicted, Jewish institutions may not accept further money from "a known thief" (M.T. Laws of Theft 2:3). However, if the money is from a family endowment, and if the percentage of the capital contributed by the felon is less than half, institutions may accept money from the endowment. Whether they should — and whether they should publicize the name of the family by naming a building or a school after it — is a practical decision that the institution has to make, weighing whether taking the money is worth possibly alienating future donors and compromising the institution's name. If the money is being donated by the felon specifically as an act of *teshuvah*, however, the institution may actually have a duty to accept it.

This is but one example of the many moral dilemmas that leaders are called upon to resolve. To do this well, those training to be leaders need to hone the character traits delineated by our tradition and described above. They must also sharpen their skills in analyzing the various parts of a dilemma and in imagining and evaluating various ways to respond to it. In doing so, no person should see him/herself as the repository of all wisdom; rather, leaders need to consult our tradition for the rich wisdom it brings to moral matters as well as the other people involved in the welfare of the organization. When Moses faced a question he could not answer, he could and did ask God directly; we cannot do that. Unlike Moses, though, we are able to call upon a long tradition of smart, experienced, and well-meaning Jews who grappled with interpreting our sacred texts and the realities of the situations they confronted to determine how God would have had us respond to such problems in the past. We have each other to consult as well, for, as the Rabbis said, "If the Children of Israel are not prophets, they are the descendants of prophets" (B. *Pesachim* 66a). May our leadership be informed and enhanced by these morally sensitive sources. ■