

Passing the Baton of Leadership

by Michael Rudolph

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Our meeting here today is for a very special occasion, which is passing the baton of Ohev Yisrael's office of Senior Rabbi from me to Rabbi Aaron, and the passing of his office of Associate Rabbi from him to me. This plan for leadership succession was on the elders' drawing board due to my advancing age even before we knew of Aaron's availability. Such planning should occur in all synagogues and churches, but alas it is not because those in senior leadership too often try to hold on to their positions of leadership until they either die in office or declining health precludes their continuing. In either case, the senior leader's abrupt departure results in a leadership crisis due to no one having been groomed to step into the vacuum. Sometimes the aging leader succumbs to pressure and leaves the congregation disgruntled, taking loyal congregants with him. I am happy to say that Ohev Yisrael is not such a congregation and, in fact, began its tradition of orderly leadership transition twelve years ago when Scott Moore stepped down as Senior Leader in order to make a place for me, and stayed on as an elder, thereby helping me to be successful.

Interestingly, passing the baton of leadership is a recurring theme of the Bible. In early times family leadership (i.e. birthright) was passed from father to firstborn son with occasional exceptions. God himself caused Abraham's leadership to pass through Isaac, and we no doubt remember the tumultuous way in which Jacob received his birthright from Isaac, despite his brother Esau being his first-born fraternal twin.

I am also reminded of how the leadership of Israel passed from Moses to Joshua; we read in Deuteronomy 34:7-9:

“Moshe was 120 years old when he died, with eyes undimmed and vigor undiminished. The people of Isra'el mourned Moshe on the plains of Mo'av for thirty days; after this, the days of crying and mourning for Moshe ended. Y'hoshua the son of Nun was full of the Spirit of wisdom, for Moshe had laid his hands on him, and the people of Isra'el heeded him and did what ADONAI had ordered Moshe.”

There were also occasions when leadership passed, not because of the leader's advanced age, but due to his having committed sin. Such was the case when God transferred Saul's leadership of Israel to David; we read in 1 Samuel 16:1:

"ADONAI said to Sh'mu'el, "How much longer are you going to go on grieving for Sha'ul, now that I have rejected him as king over Isra'el? Fill your horn with oil, and set out; I will send you to Yishai the Beit-Lachmi, because I have chosen myself a king from among his sons."

Continuing with verses 10-12:

"Yishai presented seven of his sons to Sh'mu'el; but Sh'mu'el told Yishai, "ADONAI has not chosen these. Are all your sons here?" Sh'mu'el asked Yishai. He replied, "There is still the youngest; he's out there tending the sheep." Sh'mu'el said to Yishai, "Send and bring him back, because we won't sit down to eat until he gets here." He sent and brought him in. With ruddy cheeks, red hair and bright eyes, he was a good-looking fellow. ADONAI said, "Stand up and anoint him; he's the one.""

So, David received Saul's mantle of leadership, but his initially ruddy cheeks, red hair and bright eyes eventually gave way to age, and in 1 Kings 2:1-3 we read:

"The time came near for David to die; so he commissioned Shlomo his son as follows: "I am going the way of all the earth. Therefore, be strong; show yourself a man. Observe the charge of ADONAI your God to go in his ways and keep his regulations, mitzvot, rulings and instructions in accordance with what is written in the Torah of Moshe; so that you will succeed in all you do and wherever you go."

Concluding with verses 10-12:

"Then David slept with his ancestors and was buried in the City of David. David had ruled Isra'el for forty years- seven years in Hevron and thirty-three years in Yerushalayim. Shlomo sat on the throne of David his father; and his rule had become firmly established..."

We also read in 1 Kings 19:16 how God told Elijah that Elisha, the son of Shafat, would become Elijah's successor, and we read in 2 Kings 2:9-15:

“After they had crossed, Eliyahu said to Elisha, "Tell me what I can do for you before I am taken away from you." Elisha said, "Please! Let a double share of your spirit be on me!" He replied, "You have requested a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, you will get what you asked for; but if not, you won't." Suddenly, as they were walking on and talking, there appeared a fiery chariot with horses of fire; and as it separated the two of them from each other, Eliyahu went up into heaven in a whirlwind. Elisha saw it and cried out, "My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Isra'el!" Then he lost sight of him. Seizing his clothes, he tore them in half. Then he picked up Eliyahu's cloak, which had fallen off him. Standing on the bank of the Yarden, he took the cloak that had fallen off Eliyahu, struck the water and said, "Where is ADONAI, the God of Eliyahu?" But when he actually did strike the water, it divided itself to the left and to the right; then Elisha crossed over. When the guild prophets of Yericho saw him in the distance, they said, "The spirit of Eliyahu does rest on Elisha." Advancing to meet him, they prostrated themselves on the ground before him ...”

There are other examples of leadership succession as well, but I will jump forward to the most prominent of them all, the one where Yeshua was preparing to return to his Father in Heaven and told his disciples in John 14:26:

“But the Counselor, the Ruach HaKodesh, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything; that is, he will remind you of everything I have said to you.”

So, the *Ru'ach* HaKodesh succeeded Yeshua, but he was not the only one – Yeshua’s disciples succeeded him, for he told his disciples in John 14:12:

“Yes, indeed! I tell you that whoever trusts in me will also do the works I do! Indeed, he will do greater ones, because I am going to the Father”.

Similar to how Elisha succeeded Elijah in his prophetic ministry by receiving his spirit when he was taken to Heaven, Yeshua’s disciples succeeded Yeshua in his ministry by receiving the Holy Spirit whom he sent back after he was taken up. And we who are Yeshua’s present day disciples are successors to his early disciples in that we have all inherited their ministry of succession – making new disciples of those who will, in turn, succeed us by making other new disciples, and on and on.

But our business today is to transfer the title and responsibility of Congregational Leader of Ohev Yisrael to our brother Rabbi Aaron Allsbrook. There are several criteria that are required of the office, primarily those listed in 1 Timothy 3:2-7:

“A congregation leader must be above reproach, he must be faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, orderly, hospitable and able to teach. He must not drink excessively or get into fights; rather, he must be kind and gentle. He must not be a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, having children who obey him with all proper respect; for if a man can't manage his own household, how will he be able to care for God's Messianic Community? He must not be a new believer, because he might become puffed up with pride and thus fall under the same judgment as did the Adversary. Furthermore, he must be well regarded by outsiders, so that he won't fall into disgrace and into the Adversary's trap.”

Similarly, in Titus 1:6-9:

“A leader must be blameless, husband to one wife, with believing children who do not have a reputation for being wild or rebellious. For an overseer, as someone entrusted with God's affairs, must be blameless- he must not be self-willed or quick-tempered, he must not drink excessively, get into fights or be greedy for dishonest gain. On the contrary, he must be hospitable, devoted to good, sober-mindedness, uprightness, holiness and self-control. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy Message that agrees with the doctrine; so that by his sound teaching he will be able to exhort and encourage, and also to refute those who speak against it.”

There are three other important characteristics that bear mentioning as well.¹

- a. He must be gifted and skilled.
- b. He must be theologically astute.
- c. He must be competent in organizational management.
- d. He must be a team builder.

Ohev Yisrael's elders have compared Rabbi Allsbrook to all the above criteria and have concluded that he is well qualified. So, with assurance that it is a biblical precept to implement succession from a Congregational Leader of advanced age to one who is younger, let us turn to today's matter at hand which is transferring the

¹ “Passing the Leadership Baton,” Tom Mullins, pp.76-82 (Thomas Nelson: Nashville, 2015).

position and title of “Congregational Leader of Ohev Yisrael” (along with its authority and responsibilities) from me, Ohev Yisrael’s current Congregational Leader, to my associate, Rabbi Aaron Allbrook.