

# Bold Leadership

**W**hen the Israelites stood on the east bank of the Jordan River, on the threshold of the Promised Land, Moses knew he would not cross the river with them. Concerned about the fate of the people after his death, he implored the Almighty to appoint a worthy successor who would “go out in front of them and return in front of them ... that they should not be like sheep without a shepherd.”

The commentators see this as a reference to the leader’s deportment in time of war. Most leaders, they explain, stand back at the rear of their armies and observe the conflict, but the worthy leader’s place is at the head of his army. We can understand full well why the leader should go out at the head of his army. His presence in the vanguard would undoubtedly inspire his soldiers with confidence and courage. But what is the point of his returning from battle at the head of his army?

Perhaps we can say that the purpose of his going forth into battle at the head of his army is not to lead the charge brandishing his sword and shouting at the top of his lungs. Rather, it is to show the people how a person of deep faith goes into battle. His lips do not utter bloodcurdling yells. Rather, he whispers prayers to the Almighty for the safety of his soldiers and the success of his people. He does not ride ahead with his head flung back and his shoulders arrogantly squared but rather with shoulders hunched forward in humility and a deep awareness that ultimate victory does not derive from the barrel of a gun but from merits gained by a life properly lived. When the soldiers see how their leader goes into battle, they will draw these lessons for themselves, and then the entire army will go forth in a manner that deserves the gracious blessings of the Almighty.

It is equally important for the worthy leader to set a proper example when the army returns from victorious battle. He does not return with whoops of joyous intoxication, reveling in his own prowess. He returns with his head bowed in humility and his lips murmuring prayers of thanksgiving. He knows that he owes

his victory to the kindness of the Almighty and that all his skills and training could not guarantee him victory on the battlefield if the Almighty did not will it to be. The soldiers will then take their example from their leader and view this moment as a call for introspection and reevaluation, a time to express gratitude and draw closer to the Almighty. Having been granted the gift of survival and life, they will seize the moment as a time to reaffirm the enduring values of life and resolve to live according to their dictates.