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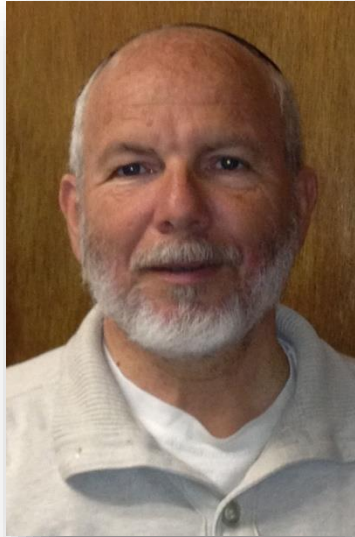
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Timeless Lessons About Leadership from the Midrash

Abstract

This paper examines two ancient Midrashim and shows that many important messages about leadership are embedded in them. The first Midrash describes the critical personality trait Moses possessed that made him uniquely suitable to be a leader of the Israelites — compassion. The second Midrash appears heretical since it has Moses correcting God. Indeed, God even openly admits, "You have taught me something." The primary lessons are that leaders must be compassionate, humble, willing to listen to advice, eager to make changes when necessary, and admit to mistakes.

Introduction

Storytelling skills are becoming an essential device to persuade and inspire people. Narratives are used in the business world to raise funds from investors, connect with shareholders, motivate employees and get them engaged, convey a company's mission statement, and demonstrate to the public that a firm is making the world a better place (Bluestein, 2014; Gallo, 2016; Howard, 2016; Knowledge@Wharton, 2016; Prive, 2016). According to Charlie Rose, a talk show host, "What sets TED talks apart is that the big ideas are wrapped up in personal stories" (Gallo, 2016, p. 63). Stories made up more than 65% of the content of the 500 most popular TED talks (Dykes, 2016).

The sages of the Talmud were not historians; they told stories. These stories are a memorable way of communicating essential truths ranging from ethics to theology. Rubenstein makes the point that:

The storytellers were not attempting to document 'what actually happened' out of a dispassionate interest in the objective historical record, or to transmit biographical facts in order to provide pure data for posterity. This type of detached, impartial writing of a biography is a distinctly modern approach. Nowadays, we distinguish biography from fiction...In pre-modern cultures, however, the distinction between biography and fiction was blurred. Ancient authors saw themselves as teachers, and they were more concerned with the didactic point than historical accuracy (Rubenstein, 2002, p. 12).

What is Midrash?

In Judaism, the term Midrash (plural Midrashim) refers to a form of rabbinic literature that offers commentary or interpretation of biblical texts. A Midrash (pronounced "mid-rash") may be an effort to clarify ambiguities in an ancient original text or to make the words applicable to current times. A Midrash can feature writing that is quite scholarly and logical in nature or can artistically make its points through parables or allegories. When formalized as a proper noun "Midrash" refers to the entire body of collected commentaries that were compiled in the first 10 centuries CE (Pelaia, 2019, para. 1).

There are two types of Midrash: *Midrash aggadah* and *Midrash halachah*. Midrash Aggadah is a Rabbinic interpretation of Scripture that relies greatly on stories, legends, homilies, and parables to teach ethics and morals (the literal meaning of aggadah is telling or narrative). Midrash Halachah are collections mainly concentrating on the practical aspects of Jewish law. It should be noted that many Midrashic stories are also found in the Talmud, and this is expected because the sages quoted and discussed in the Midrash are generally the same as those in the Talmud.

Midrash Rabbah (the Great Midrash) is the most extensive collection of aggadah. The word *midrash* is derived from the Hebrew word *darash*, which means to inquire, investigate, or search. The goal of a Midrash is to highlight a more profound sense of the text's meaning. Midrashim often yield precious lessons for the time period of its author as well as for future generations. Midrash has become invaluable as a teaching tool, even for children, because Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, 1040-1105), the pre-eminent Torah commentator, makes extensive use of them in his commentary (Sigel, 2010).

Many of these stories involve God, Abraham, Moses, Elijah, and even Satan to ensure that the stories have an impact (Friedman, 2022). Rubenstein (2002, p. 14) stresses that the correct question to ask about a Talmudic/Midrashic story is "What lesson did he [the storyteller] wish to impart to his audience?" and "What does the story teach us about rabbinic beliefs, virtues, and ethics?" Those are more important questions than whether the story is entirely accurate, partially true, or a metaphor.

A famous Midrash used to demonstrate how a young Abraham used logic to teach others (including his father) the foolishness of idolatry:

Terach [Abraham's father] was a manufacturer of idols. He once went away somewhere and left Abraham to sell them in his place. A man came in and wished to buy one. 'How old are you?' Abraham asked the man. 'Fifty years old,' he said. 'Woe to such a man, who is fifty years old and would worship a day-old object!' Avraham said.

On another occasion, a woman came in with a plateful of flour and requested, 'Take this and offer it to them.' So he took a stick, broke the idols, and put the stick in the hand of the largest. When his father returned, he demanded, 'What have you done to them?' 'I cannot conceal it from you. A woman came with a plateful of fine meal and asked me to offer it to them. One claimed, 'I must eat first,' while another claimed, 'I must eat first.' Thereupon, the largest idol arose, took the stick and broke them.' Terach said to Abraham: 'Why do you make sport of me? Have idols any consciousness?' Abraham replied: 'Should not your ears hear what your mouth has said?' (Midrash Genesis Rabbah 38; based on a translation by Sefaria.org).

Midrash One: Moses as Shepherd

This story about Moses when he was Jethro's shepherd teaches us a timeless lesson about leadership:

Moses was shepherding his father-in-law's sheep one day when one of them bolted. Moses followed the runaway animal until it reached a body of water, where it stopped for a drink. Moses compassionately said to the sheep, 'If only I had known that you thirsted for water. You must be exhausted from running ...' Saying this, he scooped up the animal, placed it on his shoulders, and headed back to his flock. Said God: 'If this is how he cares for the sheep of man, he is definitely fit to shepherd Mine ...' (Midrash Shemot Rabbah 2:2; translated by Zarchi (2013, para. 4).

This narrative demonstrates that a leader must have compassion. Note that God also shows concern for His people and thus desires the same of any leader. The shepherd metaphor is often used in the Abrahamic religions, and Psalm 23 exemplifies this, "The Lord is my shepherd..." There is a great deal of evidence that compassionate leadership is critical in the knowledge economy.

It is the nature of leaders to surround themselves with 'yes men' and cater to the constituency that supports them. In Moses we find the opposite. His greatness was that he loved and cared for every member of the flock entrusted to him, never reconciling himself to the fact that some people are just not worth losing sleep over. He put his life on the line for the Jews who violated Judaism's most sacred tenet just days after they were given the commandment to not worship idols. He never gave up trying to make peace with his nemeses Datan and Aviram, who tried to have him killed for the crime of saving a fellow Jew from an Egyptian taskmaster. And even Korach, who led a mutiny against him, was the recipient of never-ending overtures for reconciliation. God himself pleads with Moses numerous times to distance himself from these troublemakers and let them suffer the consequences, but Moses, faithful shepherd of Israel, is concerned with the fate of every individual (Zarchi, 2013, para. 6).

Zarchi finds another valuable lesson in this story.

But there is another layer to this Midrash. What Moses understood from his years of shepherding was that when a single sheep leaves the group and goes off on its own, it isn't an act of rebellion. It's just thirsty, and its leaders have not been able to quench its thirst. So, too, every Jew is precious; no one is expendable. When Jews wander off from their community or even reject the Judaism they grew up with, it is a cry for help rather than insubordination. They are looking for inspiration, searching for meaning. Rather than criticizing, Moses lifts them up and says: I'm sorry, I didn't realize your spiritual needs weren't being met (para. 7).

A growing body of evidence demonstrates that compassionate leadership can help an organization flourish (Dutton & Workman, 2015; Dutton, Workman & Hardin, 2014; Frost, 2003; Frost, 1999). Boedker conducted a significant study in Australia involving 5,600 people in 77 organizations, examining the link between profitability and leadership styles. He found that compassionate leadership had the most important influence on productivity and profitability. The study defined compassionate leadership as the ability of leaders to value people and "to spend more time and effort developing and recognising their people,

welcoming feedback, including criticism, and fostering cooperation among staff” (SmartCompany, 2012, para. 2).

Midrash Two: Moses Teaches God

Let us examine another Midrash involving Moses and God. This story is unusual because God is supposed to be omniscient. What is this story that ostensibly appears blasphemous teaching us?

‘Then sang Israel’ (Numbers 21:17). This is one of the three things said by Moses to God, to which God replied: You have taught Me something. Moses said to God [after the Israelites made the Golden Calf]: Creator of the Universe! How can Israel realize what they have done? Were they not raised in Egypt and all Egyptians are idolaters? Also, when You gave the Torah, You did not give it to them. And they were not even standing nearby; as Scripture (Exodus 20:18) states: ‘And the people stood at a distance.’ And You only gave the Torah to me; as Scripture states (Exodus 24:1): ‘Then He said to Moses: Come up to the Lord.’ When You gave the commandments, You did not give it to them. You did not say ‘I am the Lord your [plural] God, ‘but said (Exodus 20:1): ‘I am the Lord thy [singular] God.’ Did I sin? God said to Moses: By your life, you have spoken well and have taught Me. From now on, I will use the expression ‘I am the Lord your [plural] God.’

The second occasion was when God said to Moses (Exodus 20:5): ‘punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.’ Moses said to God: Creator of the Universe, Many wicked people begot righteous children. Shall the children be punished for the sins of their fathers? Terach worshipped idols, yet Abraham his son was a righteous person. Similarly, Hezekiah was virtuous, though Ahaz his father was wicked. So also Josiah was righteous, yet Amon his father was wicked. Is it proper that the righteous should be punished for the sins of their fathers? God said to Moses: You have taught Me something. By your life, I shall nullify My words and uphold yours; as it says (Deuteronomy 24:16): ‘Parents are not to be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their parents; each will die for their own sin.’ And by your life, I shall record these words in your name; as it says (II Kings 14:6): ‘in accordance with what is written in the Book of the Law of Moses where the Lord commanded: ‘Parents are not to be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their parents...’

The third occasion was when God said to Moses: Make war with Sichon. Even if he does not seek to interfere with you, you must start a war against him, as it says (Deuteronomy 2:24): ‘Set out now and cross the Arnon Gorge. See, I have given into your hand Sichon the Amorite, king of Heshbon, and his country. Begin to take possession of it and engage him in battle.’ Moses, however, did not do so but, in accordance with what is written lower down, sent messengers [of peace]. God said to Moses: By your life, I shall nullify My own words and uphold yours; as it says (Deuteronomy 20:10): ‘When you approach a city to wage war against it, make its people an offer of peace.’ Seeing that Sichon did not accept their peace overtures, God cast him down before them; as it says (Deuteronomy 2:33): ‘the Lord our God delivered him over to us and we struck him down’ (Midrash Rabbah Numbers 19:33; based on Soncino translation).

The following are some important lessons that may be derived from this extraordinary Midrash.

Leaders Have to Listen

God may be omniscient, but he is willing to listen to what others say and learn from them. This is surprising and, of course, curious, given that He is omniscient. This Midrash relates that Moses “taught” God three things.

Sacks (2016) has the following to say about listening.

Job, who has suffered unjustly, is unmoved by the arguments of his comforters. It is not that he insists on being right; he wants to be heard. Not by accident does justice presuppose the rule of audi alteram partem, ‘Hear the other side.’

Listening lies at the very heart of relationship. It means that we are open to the other, that we respect him or her, that their perceptions and feelings matter to us. We give them permission to be honest, even if this means making ourselves vulnerable in so doing. A good parent listens to their child. A good employer listens to his or her workers. A good company listens to its customers or clients. A good leader listens to those he or she leads. Listening does not mean agreeing but it does mean caring. Listening is the climate in which love and respect grow.

*In Judaism we believe that our relationship with God is an ongoing tutorial in our relationships with other people. How can we expect God to listen to us if we fail to listen to our spouse, our children, or those affected by our work? And how can we expect to encounter God if we have not learned to listen. On Mount Horeb, God taught Elijah that He was not in the whirlwind, the earthquake or the fire but in the *kol demamah dakah*, the ‘still, small voice’ (1 Kings 19) that I define as a voice you can only hear if you are listening (Sacks, 2016, paras. 14-16).*

The listening described above is one that implies a willingness to make changes and not be obstinate. There is a vast difference between hearing and listening: Hearing is involuntary, but listening suggests paying attention and focusing on what is being said. Learning can only occur if one listens (Horowitz, 2012). God listens and makes three changes to His Torah based on suggestions given to Him by Moses.

Leaders Should Have Advisors

Arrogant people generally have too much hubris and do not admit they can learn from others. They make decisions unilaterally and surround themselves with sycophants who agree with everything they say. God may have all the answers but still “learns” a few things from Moses. Leaders need to surround themselves with intelligent people who can disagree. President Woodrow Wilson once said: “I not only use all the brains that I have, but all that I can borrow.”

Reuben (2014, para. 8) observes that Moses “turns for advice and counsel to a Midianite priest, a holy man from another religion, a practitioner and leader of another spiritual tradition.” This is quite unusual. According to Van Dierendonck (2011, p. 1246), “Leaders who show humility by acknowledging that they do not have all the answers, by being true to themselves, and by their interpersonal accepting attitude, create a working environment where followers feel safe and trusted.”

Leaders Must Have Humility

In the Torah, the king must (Deuteronomy 17:14-20) not have too many horses, wives, and personal wealth. The reason given is (Deuteronomy 17: 20) “that his heart be not lifted up

above his brethren and not turn from the commandment right or left.” Matthew Henry, biblical commentator, makes the following point in his commentary on this verse: “He must carefully avoid everything that would turn him from God and religion. Riches, honours, and pleasures are three great hindrances of godliness.” This story demonstrates that the “King of Kings” has great humility. Once a leader becomes arrogant and self-absorbed, the organization (or kingdom) suffers.

Although humility is often neglected by the business leadership literature, it is the trait that unlocks all other personal and leadership virtues (Argandona, 2015, p. 67). Prime & Salib (2014) surveyed over 1500 workers from several countries and concluded that humility is crucial for successful leaders. Van Dierendonck (2011, p. 1254), in his review of the literature on servant leadership, affirms that humility is a critical trait in servant leaders: “Servant leadership is demonstrated by empowering and developing people; by expressing humility, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance, and stewardship; and by providing direction..” Bhattacharya, Chatterjee, and Basu (2017) opine that there is a positive relationship between humility and constructs such as self-esteem, generosity, helpfulness, forgiveness, and leadership.

Collins (2001; 2005) posits that the most effective leaders are what he refers to as “Level 5” leaders; very few leaders reach this level. Level 5 leaders have humility and fierce determination to make their organizations succeed. They have no interest in adulation. Yes, they are very ambitious, but “their ambition is first and foremost for the institution and its greatness, not for themselves.” They are motivated by “what they build, create, and contribute” and not by “fame, fortune, power, adulation, and so on.” Collins (2001, p. 21) maintains: “Level 5 leaders channel their ego needs away from themselves and into the larger goal of building a great company. It's not that Level 5 leaders have no ego or self-interest. Indeed, they are incredibly ambitious - but their ambition is first and foremost for the institution, not themselves.”

The Talmud uses another story involving God to explain why the law follows the School of Hillel. Note that the Hillelite opinion prevails because this school “listened” to other views and possessed the trait of humility.

For three years the School of Shammai and the School of Hillel debated each other. These said the halachah is in agreement with our view, and these said the halachah is in agreement with our view. Then, a heavenly voice (bath kol) went forth and announced: both opinions are the words of the living God, but the halachah is in agreement with the School of Hillel... What did the School of Hillel do to merit that the halachah is according to their view? Because they were kind and modest, and they studied their own opinion and those of the School of Shammai. And not only that, but they would mention the opinion of the School of Shammai before their own (Babylonian Talmud, Eruvin 13b).

A leader with humility will also recognize the importance of having a successor. Ideally, successors should have constructive relationships with the incumbent leaders they will replace. Sometimes, even a great leader must recognize that it is time to move on and pass the torch to another individual with new and fresh ideas. A leader must always put the interests of the organization (or country) ahead of his own interests.

For the incumbent leader, succession is a time to confront the passage of time, the end of a career, and even mortality itself. It is no wonder that relationships between successors

and those they hope to replace are so fraught with emotion (Ciampa & Watkins, 1999, para. 3).

Despite his humility, Moses had no problem being forceful with God and demanding to know who would be his successor (Numbers 27:16-18): “May the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint someone over the congregation who shall go out before them and come in before them, and who shall take them out and bring them in; let the Lord's congregation not be like sheep that have no shepherd.” The Midrash (Tanchuma 10) explains why Moses referred to the Lord as the “God of the spirits of all flesh.” Moses said, “Master of the World, the character of each person is manifest to You; they are not similar to each other. Appoint a leader who can put up with each individual according to his personality.” Moses understood that an extraordinary leader appreciates each person’s uniqueness and responds to their particular requirements.

Nobody is Perfect; Leaders Must be Willing to Admit to Mistakes

Closely tied to the trait of humility is a willingness to admit to mistakes. This Midrash demonstrates that God is humble, wholeheartedly listens to what mortals say, and admits to making mistakes. God is not averse to saying to Moses: “You have taught Me something.” He could have said: “My way is better but let's do it your way.” If God, who is omniscient, is willing to learn, then mortal leaders should also be receptive to new ideas. A willingness to admit to mistakes and even apologize for them is vital for leaders. We have seen many leaders get into serious trouble because of cover-ups. Whitehurst (2015) has the following to say about a willingness to admit to mistakes and the ability to learn from one's mistakes.

That’s how you truly sow the seeds of engagement. Think about it: who would you rather trust – the person who denies anything is amiss or the person who admits their error and then follows up with a plan to correct it? Better yet, what if that same person who admits they made a mistake reaches out to their team for ideas on how to make things right? I’ve found that leaders who show their vulnerability, and admit that they are human, foster greater engagement among their associates (para. 6).

Llopis (2015) believes that admitting mistakes is a way a leader may build a culture of trust in an organization.

When leaders admit to making mistakes – creating an opportunity to earn respect, strengthen their teams and lead by example – it ultimately builds a culture of trust. A workplace culture that promotes trust allows employees to live with an entrepreneurial attitude, which stimulates innovation and initiative (para. 14).

McCloskey (2016) also underscores that admitting when you are wrong builds trust among subordinates. Leaders who are unwilling to acknowledge that they have made a mistake demonstrate to followers that they have little integrity and all that matters is being right, not being truthful. In some cases, these leaders will find others to blame for their own blunders. One study cited by McCloskey based on a sample of 3,100 employees found:

Eighty-one percent of respondents said that having a leader who will admit to being wrong is important or very important to inspiring them to give their best efforts at work, but only 41 percent said their supervisors could be trusted do so consistently – a gap of 40 percent (para. 2).

Leaders Must Demonstrate Gratitude and Appreciation to Followers

Baldoni (2009) also stresses the importance of humility and asserts that leaders that want to inspire followers must “acknowledge what others do” and see themselves as “talent groomers.” Recognition of the accomplishments of others and promoting them is the way to lead an organization. This is why the Midrash has God saying to Moses, “You have taught Me something.” Russell & Stone (2002) review the literature on servant leadership and consider the appreciation of others as a functional attribute. This is accomplished by listening to others and providing encouragement. The APA’s 2022 *Work and Well-Being Survey* provides evidence that communication received from employers is correlated with job satisfaction (APA, 2022).

A Legal System Must be Based on a “Living” Document

The Torah consists of the five books of the Hebrew Bible (the Pentateuch) and is the Jewish written law. The same questions that arise today regarding interpreting the Constitution were issues in Talmudic times about understanding the laws of the Torah. This Midrash suggests that one should not be a textualist/originalist when it comes to law.

Burling explains the difference between textualism, originalism, and living constitutionalism.

Originalism’s revival in the 1980s was a reaction to the theory of the ‘Living Constitution.’ That theory called for judges to interpret the Constitution, not according to its language, but rather according to evolving societal standards. In other words, judges shouldn’t focus on what the Constitution says, but on what it ought to say if it were written today (Burling, 2022, para. 4).

The term originalist may be interpreted in two ways; the difference is relatively small.

One is ‘original intent’ that says we should interpret the Constitution based on what its drafters originally intended when they wrote it. The other is that we should interpret the Constitution based on the original meaning of the text – not necessarily what the Founders intended, but how the words they used would have generally been understood at the time.

Both versions of originalism – original intent and original meaning – contend that the Constitution has permanent, static meaning that’s baked into the text. Originalism, in either iteration, is in direct contravention of the ‘Living Constitution’ theory (Burling, 2022, paras. 6-8).

In the U.S., we have this problem with interpreting the Constitution because of these several approaches (Kelso, 1994). The late Justice Antonin Scalia believed the correct way to interpret the Constitution was according to the “public meaning.” He railed against using an approach that saw the Constitution as a “living,” morphing, and evolving document. To him, the only good Constitution was a dead one (Murphy, 2016).

This story supports the view that God, the framer of His constitution, the Torah, understood that man is supposed to interpret it and therefore gave in to Moses’ objections. God’s original intention when he gave the Torah is irrelevant. This story refutes Scalia’s approach to the Constitution. More importantly, it may hint that there will always be differences of opinion regarding religious texts, and there is no reason to fight over differences in interpretation.

This Midrash may be a reaction to an incident that occurred before the Temple’s destruction. The students were asked to go up to the upper chamber of the house of Channaniah b.

Chizkiyah b. Garon to vote on questions involving *halachah* (Jewish law). Unfortunately, the School of Shammai students took out spears and swords and either killed or threatened to kill anyone from the School of Hillel that was about to climb the steps and vote. Lau (2010, pp. 223-224) cites evidence from the Cairo Geniza that there was an actual civil war between the two schools, but many scholars cannot accept that the Shammaites would resort to murder to get their way. Once the Shammaites were in the majority, they passed religiously stringent laws known as “The Eighteen Articles” (Jastrow & Mendelsohn, 2002). The Talmud (Jerusalem Talmud Shabbos 1:4) notes that “this day was as grievous for the Jewish people as the day on which the Golden Calf was made.”

Lau explains the fundamental philosophical difference between the two schools. Both schools belonged to the Pharisees, but the differences in how the law was decided became insurmountable because of an unwillingness to compromise on the part of the Shammaites.

Hillel’s rulings and teaching were based on the rules of logical deduction, whereas Shammai preserved the ancient tradition, transmitted from person to person, with no innovations or upheavals... Shammai lives in a world of tradition and decrees, a world in which there is no room for intellectual argumentation and debate (Lau, 2010, pp. 222-223).

After the destruction of the Second Temple, the Hillelites were in control of the Sanhedrin and the direction Judaism would take. The leader of the Jewish people was the *nasi* (President of the Sanhedrin); admittedly, he had little real power since the Romans controlled Israel. Hillel and his descendants served as heads of the Sanhedrin (*nesiim*, plural of *nasi*) for fifteen generations. They instituted many laws that considered the spirit of the law and the needs of people rather than being purely text-based (Friedman, 2015). The Hillelites made the legal system more flexible and introduced innovative principles that include *kvod habriot* (human dignity), *darkei shalom* (ways of peace), *tikkun olam* (repairing the world), *dracheha darkei noam* (the ways of the Torah are pleasantness), and much more (Friedman, 2015).

Leaders Must Have Compassion

This Midrash also supports the opinion that leaders must be caring individuals. The three occasions where God indicates that Moses has taught him something involve showing compassion. On the first occasion, Moses “teaches” God how easy it is for human beings to misinterpret laws, which is why God has to show compassion. Of course, this is an excuse, but a good leader is supposed to find explanations for his followers when they make a mistake. The second incident also deals with compassion. Moses makes a good case for not going overboard with punishment, and God should only punish the evildoer and not his children. The third situation involves showing compassion to an evil king and his empire and giving him a chance to make peace. In all three cases, Moses shows God how to demonstrate empathy.

Leaders Must Have Courage

It takes a great deal of courage to argue with God. Moses was not afraid to challenge God, which is probably why he was the perfect leader for the Jewish people. Moses contends with God after the incident of the Golden Calf. He stood up to God and demanded (Exodus 32:32): “But now, please forgive their sin – but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written.” Later, when the Israelites made another serious blunder by believing the false report of the spies (Numbers 13-14), Moses was offered the chance to become the leader of a new nation

consisting of his descendants (Numbers 14:12): “I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of you a greater nation and mightier than they.” A true servant leader, Moses could not be enticed to abandon his flock, no matter how good the offer, and argued with God. God is prepared to wipe out the Israelites, but Moses fights on their behalf. This is the sign of a great leader.

Conclusion

Even the strangest Midrashim have many ideas implanted in them, and one should search for the hidden lessons. The key concepts in these Midrashim deal with leadership and make it clear that leaders must be compassionate and humble. They have to know how to listen and admit to mistakes; they should show appreciation for followers who offer them good advice.

Often religious leaders insist that their approach is the only correct one, and this has caused many wars between different sects. As noted above, there was a conflict between the Schools of Hillel and Shammai. This story makes clear that God is receptive to other opinions, and there is no reason to go to war over differences in interpretation. It is more than likely that someone from the School of Hillel authored this Midrash. He recognized the danger of being too inflexible when understanding legal texts, especially in situations involving peace or human dignity. It is certainly true that human dignity and social justice “are implicit in the biblical concept that man was created in God’s image” (Besdin, 1979, p. 190). This Midrash goes one step further and adds that leaders — political, corporate, and religious — must emulate God and possess humility, compassion, and a willingness to listen, make changes, and admit to mistakes.

Sadly, we live in a hyperpolarized society and ridicule anyone with different viewpoints. Because we scorn others who disagree with us, we are not open to listening to facts (Warren, 2022). In effect, we live in a post-factual society where image trumps substance.

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