

My mother loved to tell her students that Albert Einstein had difficulties in school. Her students struggled with dyslexia or ADHD and to hear that Albert Einstein hadn't found school easy either was very empowering. If Albert Einstein, a genius, voted man of the century in the year 2000, wasn't successful in school, maybe there might be hope for them. Maybe their future would be better than their present difficulties seemed to indicate.

Now I understand that there is some question as to whether Einstein can truly be labelled learning disabled. Still in interviews Einstein admitted to having problems with memorization and said that he found learning difficult. His teachers thought he asked too many questions. One told him that he "would never be able to do anything that would make any sense in this life." About test taking, he wrote, "I would feel under such strain that I felt, rather than going to take a test, that instead, I was walking to the guillotine." So even if he lacked a diagnosed learning issue: "a piece Einstein's legacy can continue to be motivating other bright students who face learning challenges, regardless of classification," to have hope for their future.

At the beginning of this week's portion Moses tries to beg off from leadership because he feels unqualified. In that he is similar to the other later prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah, who also do not feel up to the burden being placed upon them. Moses objects in a number of ways and persists even as God tries to overcome his objections.

In their first meeting, in response to Moses' reluctance to lead, God reveals himself, as "Ehyeh asher Ehyeh I will be what I will be". Biblical commentators wonder, how is that an answer to Moses's objections? And yet, these words must be a clue. This is the only time that God uses this name. God had many other choices of names to use, many of which seem more germane to Moses' problem. God could have used a name that refers to God's strength or God's all knowing nature. Instead God uses this name, "I will be what I will be". Why?

Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapiro, whose sermons from the Warsaw Ghetto during World War II, have amazingly been found and preserved, spoke to this week's portion. He said, "We tend to think of ourselves as we are, and as we have been." What this name of God is teaching us is that : "We need also to consider what we might become."

Moses doubted his own suitability for a position of this magnitude and his ability to lead the people to freedom, based on the experiences he had to that moment. Having grown up in the palace, he was not known to the Israelites and they didn't trust him. He was also not an orator, and worried about his ability to get God's message across. At first it seems that Moses is right. He doesn't do well, and things get worse. You could not blame the people for wondering if he has the right stuff. And yet Moses grows into this position. The exact traits that seem to hold him back at first, become assets. In the end his hesitation and humility help him to grow into the great leader he will become.

One commentary notes that Moses is not like Nachshon who leads by jumping into the fray. It is Nachshon ben Aminadab, who with the Egyptian army coming closer and closer, runs into the sea of reeds all the way to his nostrils, before the waters part. That is true, another rabbi responds, he is not Nachshon, but then again, he is also not Nadav and Abihu, Aaron's two sons who rashly offer a strange offering and die before God's altar. He is also not Pinchas, the zealot, who kills a sinning Israelite and his partner without recourse to legal due process. In the chapter of the Torah, which has been given the name Pinchas, God rejects this zealot and chooses instead as Moses' successor, Joshua, whose humility mirrored that of his boss, instead as Moses' successor.

While Moses' hesitancy seems to hold him back at first, over the years of his leadership, this steadiness helps him to guide the people with wisdom.

Moses wasn't the most dynamic of leaders. He wasn't a spell binding orator, or the kind of leader that people think of as their buddy. I doubt that anyone wanted to have a beer with him after work. But our tradition teaches that "Moses made up in competence what he lacked in charisma." It was "Moses' heart not his tongue that made him a leader." He always put the people first, never tempted to look out for his own interests above theirs. One commentary goes so far as to suggest that perhaps it was his stutter that forced him to think of the need others- and not just about himself. This also helped prompt the growth that came from being aware of others and their needs.

Often when we are presented with a challenge or an opportunity, we consider whether we have what is needed to respond. I agree with Rabbi Shapiro that we commonly make that assessment based on where we have been and where we are at that moment. Perhaps this Torah portion is urging us to consider where we might be able to be, looking into the future. We can amaze ourselves by looking back and seeing how far we have come. We are not who we used to be.

Hopefully we can imitate God in saying further , Eheyeh asher eheyeh—what I will be in the future is more than I am today.