

Sustainable leadership beyond the Yom Tov season

Rabbinic self-care and effective time-management



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'Clergy had alarmingly high rates of PTSD symptoms — higher than post-deployment military personnel'

Religious leaders cannot be everything and they cannot do everything. Ask Mordecai, the hero of Purim [Jeffrey Salkin, Religion News Service, 2022] <https://religionnews.com/2022/03/21/clergy-burnout-rabbis-ministers/>



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מים עמקים עצה בלב איש ואיש תבונה ידלנה: [משלי כ:ה]

Counsel in a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of wisdom will draw it out.

• ואיש - אחר ידע התבונות ידלה העצה מלבו, כלומר ילמדה מנו.
(מיוחס לר"א אבן עזרא)

- The same man, when facilitated by another person using the correct tools, can draw the counsel from his own heart. (Professor Avi Kluger, Hebrew University)

Comments welcome



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The Pre / During / Post Yom Tov Reality

- Weeks of intensive preparation
- Multiple daily tefillos and shiurim
- Pastoral demands intensify
- Personal/family time evaporates
- Post-festival exhaustion sets in
- What have we come away with? [My RH anecdote]



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סוכות וממשלה על עצמו (דרך המלך סוכות תר"צ)

- איתא במדרש פ' אמור רב ברכיה בשם ר' לוי אמר, בזכות ולקחתם לכם ביום הראשון הרי אני נגלה לכם ראשון ופורע לכם מן הראשון עשו הרשע שנקרא ראשון ויצא הראשון ובונה לכם בהמ"ק שנקרא ראשון ומביא לכם הראשון זה המשיח וכו'
- כי בכל ראשון יש התחדשות, ואם לאו לא היה נקרא ראשון, אבל אינו ראשון בהחלט רק ראשון לדבר זה
- וזה גם ענין הממשלה על עצמו שצריך הישראל למשול ולא יהיה הפקר שהעולם מחשבותיו ותאותיו ימשלו בו יכנסו בו ויפעלו עליו. מי שחידש בקרב איזה דבר והוא הראשון והמחדש בקרב. בחי' אלה תולדות נח נח, שהוליד א"ע, אז הוא אדון ומושל ע"ע, משא"כ מי שלא חידש בקרב ולא תיקן עוד בקרב מאומה אינו ראשון מחדש ואדון ע"ע וקשה שיוכל למשול ע"ע.
- אבל בר"ה יוה"כ שהאיש ישראל שב ותיקן א"ע ונעשה ראשון לעצמו אז ראשון לחשבון עונות הוא מתחיל לחשב שכר עבירה למה מפני שהוא ראשון מחדש ואדון לעצמו.

What have we come away with? Discussion



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Delegation, Self-care and the Mordechai paradigm

Some obvious thoughts



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ויהי ממחרת וישב משה לשפט את העם ויעמד העם על משה מן
הבקר עד הערב... ויאמר חתן משה אליו לא טוב הדבר אשר אתה
עשה. נבל תכל גם אתה גם העם הזה אשר עמך כי כבוד מן הדבר
לא תוכל עשהו לבדך: [שמות יח:יג, טז-יז]

This structure, implemented before Sinai, shows that sustainable community governance paired with appropriate self-care is a prerequisite for receiving the Torah. Shared responsibility prevents burnout and strengthens the people.

- Delegation is divine wisdom
- Accepting help is wisdom, not weakness
- None of us can act successfully alone

Exercise 1 (3 mins): when does this not work for you?



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כי מרדכי היהודי משנה למלך אחשורוש וגדול ליהודים ורצוי לרב אחיו
דרש טוב לעמו ודבר שלום לכל זרעו. [אסתר י'ג:]

- ורצוי לרב אחיו – כי אין יכולת באדם לרצות הכל בעבור קנאת האחים. (ר"א אבן עזרא)

Exercise 2: We all know that we can't satisfy everyone, but we may try anyway. How does this play out?



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The Mordechai Paradigm and Rabbinic Burnout

- **Unrealistic Expectations:** Congregations expect rabbis to be experts in finance, counselling, inspirational leadership, event planning, and spiritual guidance
- **Boundary Erosion:** Expectations of 24/7 availability, with board members sometimes engaging in relational aggression or intrusive behaviour
- **Insufficient Support:** Limited staff support, inadequate budgeting, and minimal remuneration despite extensive responsibilities
- **Secondary Trauma:** Constant exposure to congregants' suffering leads to compassion fatigue and emotional residue
- **Technology Demands:** Since COVID-19, rabbis must be television producers, Zoom experts, and digital content creators without adequate training
- **Lack of Appreciation:** Despite heroic efforts, rabbis face criticism rather than gratitude



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**‘Congregations all want to hire the same rabbi...
They all want someone who attends every meeting and is at his desk working until midnight, someone who is twenty-eight years old but has preached for thirty years, someone who has a burning desire to work with teenagers but spends all his time with senior citizens, basically someone who does everything well and will stay with the congregation forever.’**

The New Rabbi [Stephen Fried, 2002]



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Practical questions and guidelines

Honest self-evaluation (full set)

- Am I experiencing signs of burnout? (exhaustion, cynicism, reduced effectiveness)
- Do I have adequate time for family, personal spiritual practice, and rest?
- Am I constantly in a state of embattlement (longing for more time, energy, recognition)?
- Have I set clear boundaries with my congregation?
- Do I have a support system of peers and mentors?
- Am I modelling healthy living for my community?



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Practical questions and guidelines (tasters)

- Identify priorities – what are you longing for?**
 - More quality time with the family
 - Professional development
 - + 5
- Create a sustainability plan**
 - This week
 - This month
 - This year
- Communicate with your community**
 - Negotiate a new vacation policy
 - Plan post-Yom Tov recovery periods into your calendar
 - + 5



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Practical strategies 101 (tasters)

- Weekly rhythms**
 - Shabbos as non-negotiable restoration
 - Learning
 - +?
- Structural delegation**
 - Delegate one major responsibility this week
 - Build something that works without you
 - +?
- Health**
 - Learn to say no
 - Schedule exercise now
 - +?



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What I can do for you?

- ❑ Career development
 - Charting and implementing a holistic professional / personal development plan
 - Preparing for the next move (up, or, when necessary, sideways) in the rabbinate
 - Developing a 'plan B' for when the 'big' career move doesn't work out
 - Managing disappointment and refocusing
 - Career diversification
- ❑ Conflict resolution
 - Manage major acute or ongoing conflict with Shul leadership
 - Dealing with inter-clerical conflict and clerical team design / development
- ❑ Transition
 - Preparation for exit - emotional, financial, professional, identity, location, narrative
 - Retirement planning
- ❑ Other
 - Public speaking and shiur preparation
 - Time management



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Be in touch

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