

We've Got the Power: Biblical Perspectives on Collective Action

This *shiur*, which will explore the power that can emerge from shared leadership, is dedicated to the women I've met on the Thai-Burma Border through the American Jewish World Service (AJWS) *We Believe* Campaign, which seeks to end violence against women and girls worldwide. The brave and humble approach of the women on the ground to lead together will inform the course of this Torah study.

GROUP ACTION: When and in what circumstances is it effective?

A.KORACH V'ADATO BaMidbar (Numbers) 16:1-4

<p>(1) Now Korah, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men; (2) and they rose up in face of Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty men; they were princes of the congregation, the elect men of the assembly, men of renown; (3) and they assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them: 'Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them; wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?' (4) And when Moses heard it, he fell upon his face.</p>	<p>(א) וַיִּקַּח קֹרַח בֶּן יִצְחָר בֶּן קָהָת בֶּן לֵוִי וְדָתָן וְאַבִּירָם בְּנֵי אֱלִיאָב וְאוֹן בֶּן פִּלֶּת בְּנֵי רְאוּבֵן.</p> <p>(ב) וַיִּקְמוּ לִפְנֵי מֹשֶׁה וְאַנְשֵׁים מִבְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַחֲמִשִּׁים וּמְאַתָּים נְשִׂאֵי עֵדָה קְרָאִי מוֹעֵד אַנְשֵׁי שָׁם.</p> <p>(ג) וַיִּקְהָלוּ עַל מֹשֶׁה וְעַל אַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם רַב לָכֶם כִּי כָל הָעֵדָה כֻּלָּם קֳדָשִׁים וּבְתוֹכְכֶם יְהוָה וּמִדּוּעַ תִּתְנַשְּׂאוּ עַל קַהֲל יְהוָה.</p> <p>(ד) וַיִּשְׁמַע מֹשֶׁה וַיִּפֹּל עַל פָּנָיו.</p>
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- Do you think Korach and his assembly sin according to these *psukim*?
- Is it significant that they acted together? Why or why not?
- What ultimately happens to them? (open a Tanach if you're not sure!) What went wrong here?

Seforno on 17:3 (Ovadia Ben Yaakov Seforno 15-16 century Italy)

<p>...And they assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. Korach, Dathan, and Aviram assembled together to complain against Moses and Aaron in the presence of the 250 princes of the</p>	<p>ויקהלו על משה ועל אהרן קרח דתן ואבירם נקהלו להתרעם על משה ועל אהרן במעמד חמשים ומאתים נשיאי העדה שהלכו שם בעצת אלה המתרעמים בעת שהיו לפני משה אנשים</p>
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<p>congregation who had gone there, at the advice of these complainers, at a time when <i>certain of the children of Israel</i> had to come to (Moses and Aaron) for judgement. Now these 250 gathered there as though they were innocently coming to stand there with Moses. This was done so that when Korach, Datan, and Aviram would later assemble against Moses and Aaron, the 250 would agree, as one, with the demands of those assembling, in the presence of certain of the Children of Israel who were also present there. Now they chose a time when a multitude would be there so as to publicize the event and to spread their complaints throughout the camp in order to increase the number of those who would rise up with them.</p>	<p>מבני ישראל הבאים לדין. ואותם החמשים ומאתים נועדו שם כמו הולכים לתומם אל משה להתיצב עמו שם כדי שכשיקהלו קרח דתן ואבירים אחר כך על משה ואהרן יהיו הם כולם כאחד מסכימים לדברי הנקהלים לפני אותם אנשים מבני ישראל שנמצאו שם ובחרו שעה שיהיה שם המון עם כדי לפרסם ולהעביר קול במחנה למען ירבו מתקוממים עמהם.</p>
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B. B'NOT ZELAPHCHAD: BaMidbar (Numbers) 27:1-7

<p>Then drew near the daughters of Zelophehad, the son of Hopher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the families of Manasseh the son of Joseph; and these are the names of his daughters: Mahlah, Noah, and Hoglah, and Milcah, and Tirzah. And they stood before Moses, and before Eleazar the priest, and before the princes and all the congregation, at the door of the tent of meeting, saying: 'Our father died in the wilderness, and he was not among the company of them that gathered themselves together against the LORD in the company of Korah, but he died in his own sin; and he had no sons. Why should the name of our father be done away from among his family, because he had no son? Give unto us a possession among the brethren of our father.' And Moses brought their cause before the LORD. And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying: 'The daughters of Zelophehad speak right: thou shalt surely give them a possession of an inheritance among their father's brethren; and thou shalt cause the inheritance of their father to pass unto them.</p>	<p>וּתְקַרְבְּנָהּ בָנוֹת צֶלְפַחַד בֶּן חֹפֵר בֶּן גִּלְעָד בֶּן מְכִיר בֶּן מְנַשֶּׁה לְמִשְׁפַּחַת מְנַשֶּׁה בֶּן יוֹסֵף וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בָּנֹתָיו מַחֲלָה נֹחַ וְחֹגְלָה וּמִלְכָּה וְתִרְצָה. וַתַּעֲמִדְנָה לְפָנֵי מֹשֶׁה וּלְפָנֵי אֱלֻעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן וּלְפָנֵי הַנְּשִׂאִים וְכָל הָעֵדָה פָּתַח אֶהֱל מוֹעֵד לֵאמֹר. אָבִינוּ מֵת בַּמִּדְבָּר וְהוּא לֹא הָיָה בְּתוֹךְ הָעֵדָה הַנוֹעֲדִים עַל יְהוָה בַּעֲדַת קֹרַח כִּי בַחֲטָאוֹ מֵת וּבָנִים לֹא הָיוּ לוֹ. לָמָּה יִגָּרַע שֵׁם אָבִינוּ מִתּוֹךְ מִשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ כִּי אֵין לוֹ בֶּן תָּנָה לָנוּ אַחֲזָה בְּתוֹךְ אַחֵי אָבִינוּ. וַיִּקְרַב מֹשֶׁה אֶת מִשְׁפָּטָן לְפָנֵי יְהוָה. וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר. בְּנֹת צֶלְפַחַד דִּבְרַת נָתַן תַּתֵּן לָהֶם אַחֲזַת נַחֲלָה בְּתוֹךְ אַחֵי אָבִיהֶם וְהִעֲבַרְתָּ אֶת נַחֲלַת אָבִיהֶן לָהֶן</p>
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- What is the goal of the daughters of Zelaphchad?
- Is it significant that they acted together? Why or why not?

- Would you say that this “action” was successful? What did they do right?

Sifrei, Numbers, 133 (Midrash)

<p>And there drew near the daughters of Tzelafchad--When the daughters of Tzelafchad heard that the land was being divided by tribes and that daughters were not included, they gathered together to take counsel, and they said: Not as the mercies of flesh and blood are those of the Holy One Blessed be He. The mercies of flesh and blood are greater for males than for females, but the mercies of the Holy One Blessed be He are equivalent for all, as it is written (Psalms 145:9): And His mercies are for all His works.”</p>	<p>ותקרבנה בנות צלפחד, כיון ששמעו בנות צלפחד שהארץ מתחלקת לשבטים לזכרים ולא לנקבות נתקבצו כולן זו על זו ליטול עצה אמרו לא כרחמי בשר ודם רחמי המקום בשר ודם רחמיו על הזכרים יותר מן הנקבות אבל מי שאמר והיה העולם אינו כן אלא רחמיו על הזכרים ועל הנקבות רחמיו על הכל שנאמר (תהלים קלו ט) טוב ה' לכל ורחמיו על כל מעשיו.</p>
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THE POWER OF SHARED LEADERSHIP

CASE STUDY 1: SHIFRA AND PU'AH Shmot (Exodus) 1:14-22

<p>And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour. And they made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field; in all their service, wherein they made them serve with rigour. And the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, of whom the name of the one was Shiphrah, and the name of the other Puah; and he said: ‘When ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, ye shall look upon the birthstool: if it be a son, then ye shall kill him; but if it be a daughter, then she shall live.’ But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men-children alive. And the king of Egypt called for the midwives, and said unto them: ‘Why have ye done this thing, and have saved the men-children alive?’ And the midwives said unto Pharaoh: ‘Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are lively, and are delivered ere the midwife come unto them.’ And God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied, and waxed very mighty. And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that He made them houses. And Pharaoh charged all his</p>	<p>ויעבדו מצרים את בני ישראל בפָּרֶךְ. ויִמְרְרוּ אֶת חַיֵּיהֶם בְּעִבְדָּה קָשָׁה בַּחֲמֹר וּבִלְבָנִים וּבְכָל עִבְדָּה בְּשׂוֹדָה אֶת כָּל עֲבֹדְתָם אֲשֶׁר עָבְדוּ בָהֶם בְּפָרֶךְ. וַיֹּאמֶר מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם לַמְיֻלְדֹת הָעִבְרִיּוֹת אֲשֶׁר שֵׁם הָאֶחָת שִׁפְרָה וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִית פּוּעָה. וַיֹּאמֶר בְּיֻלְדֹכֶן אֶת הָעִבְרִיּוֹת וּרְאִיתֶן עַל הָאֲבָנִים אִם בֵּן הוּא וְהִמַּתֶּן אֹתוֹ וְאִם בַּת הִיא וְחַיָּה וַתִּירָאן הַמְיֻלְדֹת אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים וְלֹא עָשׂוּ כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֱלֹהֵן מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם וַתַּחֲיֶינן אֶת הַיְלָדִים. וַיִּקְרָא מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם לַמְיֻלְדֹת וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶן מַדּוּעַ עָשִׂיתֶן הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וַתַּחֲיֶינן אֶת הַיְלָדִים. וַתֹּאמְרֶינן הַמְיֻלְדֹת אֶל פְּרֹעֹה כִּי לֹא כְּנָשִׁים הַמִּצְרִיּוֹת הָעִבְרִיּוֹת כִּי חַיּוֹת הֵנּוּ בְּטָרֶם תָּבוֹא אֱלֹהֵן הַמְיֻלְדֹת וַיֻּלְדוּ. וַיִּיטָב אֱלֹהִים לַמְיֻלְדֹת וַיִּרְבּוּ הָעָם וַיַּעֲצֻמוּ מְאֹד. וַיְהִי כִּי יָרְאוּ הַמְיֻלְדֹת אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם בָּתִּים. וַיֵּצְאוּ פְרֹעֹה לְכָל עַמּוֹ לֵאמֹר כָּל הַבְּנֵי הַיְלָוִד הִיאָרָה תִשְׁלִיכֶהוּ וְכָל הַבָּת תַּחֲיֶינן.</p>
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<p>people, saying: 'Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive.'</p>	
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- What was the goal of Shifra and Pu'ah?
- What about their partnership helped them to achieve that goal?

Ibn Ezra on Shemot 1:15(11-12 century Spain)

<p>And the king of Egypt spoke to the midwives: They were leaders over all of the midwives--because there is not a doubt that there would be more than 500 midwives, but these two were the leaders over them, to give tax to the king from the fees collected...and this is how I see it being practiced today in many places...</p>	<p>ויאמר מלך מצרים למילדות. שרות היו על כל המילדות כי אין ספק כי יותר מחמש מאות מילדות היו אלא אלו שתיהן שרות היו עליהן, לתת מס למלך מהשכר. וככה ראיתי היום במקומות רבות...</p>
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CASE STUDY 2: MOSHE AND AHARON Shmot (Exodus) 4:10-16, 27-31

<p>And Moses said unto the LORD: 'Oh Lord, I am not a man of words, neither heretofore, nor since Thou hast spoken unto Thy servant; for I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.' And the LORD said unto him: 'Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh a man dumb, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? is it not I the LORD? Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt speak.' And he said: 'Oh Lord, send, I pray Thee, by the hand of him whom Thou wilt send.' And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses, and He said: 'Is there not Aaron thy brother the Levite? I know that he can speak well. And also, behold, he cometh forth to meet thee; and when he seeth thee, he will be glad in his heart. And thou shalt speak unto him, and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with thy mouth, and with his mouth, and will teach you what ye shall do. And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people; and it shall come to pass, that he shall be to thee a mouth, and thou shalt be to him in God's stead.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>And the LORD said to Aaron: 'Go into the wilderness to meet Moses.' And he went, and met him in the mountain of God, and kissed him. And Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD wherewith He had sent him, and all the signs wherewith He had charged him. And Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel. And</p>	<p>ויאמר משה אל יהוה בי אדני לא איש דברים אנכי גם מתמול גם משלשם גם מאז דברך אל עבדך כי כבד פה וכבד לשון אנכי. ויאמר יהוה אליו מי שם פה לאדם או מי ישום אדם או חרש או פקח או עור הלא אנכי יהוה. ועתה לך ואנכי אהיה עם פיך והוריתך אשר תדבר. ויאמר בי אדני שלח נא ביד תשלח. ויחר אף יהוה במשה ויאמר הלא אהרן אחיך הלוי ידעתי כי דבר ידבר הוא וגם הנה הוא יצא לקראתך וראך ושמה בלבו. ודברת אליו ושמת את הדברים בפיו ואנכי אהיה עם פיך ועם פיהו והוריתי אתכם את אשר תעשו. ודבר הוא לך אל העם והנה הוא יהיה לך לפה ואתה תהנה לו לאלהים.</p> <p>ויאמר יהוה אל אהרן לך לקראת משה המדברך וילך ויפגשו בהר האלהים וישק לו. ויגד משה לאהרן את כל דברי יהוה אשר שלחו ואת כל האתת אשר צוהו. וילך משה ואהרן ויאספו את כל זקני בני ישראל. וינדבר אהרן את כל הדברים אשר דבר יהוה אל משה ויעש האתת לעיני העם. ויאמן</p>
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<p>Aaron spoke all the words which the LORD had spoken unto Moses, and did the signs in the sight of the people. And the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had remembered the children of Israel, and that He had seen their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped.</p>	<p>הָעָם וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ כִּי פָקַד יְהוָה אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכִי רָאָה אֶת עֲנִיָּם וַיִּקְדּוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ.</p>
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- What was the goal of Moshe and Aharon?
- Did they achieve that goal? If so, how did they do so?
- Where are some other situations where Moses and Aaron really complement one another as leaders?

Exodus Rabbah 5:10 (Midrash)

<p>And he went, and he met him--so it is written "Kindness and truth are met together--righteousness and peace have kissed each other." Kindness is Aharon, as it is written, "And of Levi he said: Your <i>Tumim</i> and your <i>Urim</i> be with your kind one," and Truth refers to Moses, as it is written "Not so my servant Moses, in all of My House he is faithful." So you have--<i>chesed</i> and <i>emet</i> meeting, as it says "And he went and he met him."</p>	<p>'וילך ויפגשו', הה"ד (תהלים פה) 'חסד ואמת נפגשו צדק ושלום נשקו', חסד זה אהרן שנאמר (דברים לג) 'וללוי אמר תומיך ואוריך לאיש חסידך', ואמת זה משה שנאמר (במדבר יב) 'לא כן עבדי משה וגו'', הוי 'חסד ואמת נפגשו', כמה דתימא 'וילך ויפגשוו בהר'. הא-להים', צדק זה משה שנאמר (דברים לג) 'צדקת ה' עשה', ושלום זה אהרן שנאמר (מלאכי ב) 'בשלום ובמישור הלך אתי'.</p>
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What is one commitment you would like to make in the realm of Jewish leadership?

A:

What are your strengths? Who would you need on your team to complement your strengths?

B:

To learn more about the AJWS We Believe Campaign, visit <http://webelieve.ajws.org/>. Let me know if you are interested in joining the New York action team at fruchterhadas@gmail.com.