



D'var Torah: Lay your hands

Andy Shoenig, 2005-06 NFTY President: No matter how hard we work, it will all be in vain if there is no one to hear our echo. We must all find a successor willing to carry on the projects of the past and to vision for the future, from generation to generation.

Andy Shoenig served as NFTY President, 2005-06. He delivered these words to the leadership of NFTY in 2004 upon the introduction of Generational Leadership:

And G-d spoke to Moses, "Vayidabaer adonai el Moshe... Ascend these heights of Ah b a a rim and view the land that I have given to the Israelite people. When you have seen it, you too shall be gathered to your kin."

That's a bit of an unsettling message...

Well, now I say to you—Ascend to the heights of your terms and have but a glimpse of what your work shall bring for the future. But you only have one year.

You work for events and programs and services. You work for the good of your community with your passions and visions. You sound your barbaric yawp across the rooftops of the world and pray that the echo will better our movement.

You pray that someone will hear your echo.

Han'hagah l'dorot, generational leadership. No matter how hard we work, it will all be in vain if there is no one to hear our echo. We must all find a successor willing to carry on the projects of the past and to vision for the future, from generation to generation.

After hearing of his coming death from God, Moses knew he needed someone who will guard and lead the Israelite people "so that the Eternal's nation will not be like sheep that have no shepherd."

God answers with very specific instructions. "Single out Joshua, son of Nun, an inspired individual, and lay your hand upon him." Moses is to take Joshua in front of the entire community and invest him with some of his own authority.

Note the physical aspect to this here. God calls Moses to lay his hands upon Joshua, a practice that is by no means lost in history.

Have you ever seen a rabbinic ordination? The rabbi will lay his hands upon the shoulders or the head of the ordinee and bless him. In fact, the verb used in To rah "sa'mach'ta" and the Hebrew for ordination "s'michah" come from the same root literally meaning laying of hands. There is the same laying of hands when you are blessed as a B'nai Mitzvah.

We've always been a tactile people. Especially NFTYites. We're comfortable with our handshakes, manshakes, milkshakes, secret shakes, side hugs, body hugs, group hugs, kisses on the cheek, on the lips, on the forehead, on the nose, butterfly kisses, Eskimo kisses, and that cute little European thing



where you do a quick one on each side while making that noise “mwah!” Touch, in whatever form, carries meaning.

And thus Moses, there in front of the entire Israelite community, he too laid his hands upon Joshua in order to transfer some of his leadership to his successor. Like Moses, you must reach out to find your successors. You must find them and groom them. And sometimes you must lay your hands upon your successors to make that true physical connection. Invest them with some of your leadership, so that they may rise to continue your dreams.

You have one year. Strive for excellence, strive for the strength of the movement. Think of the future and ask yourself, “Who will hear my echo?”