

In this week's Torah portion, Bo, Moshe and Aharon are called before Pharaoh for the final negotiations, resulting the final three plagues, and, ultimately, the Israelite liberation.

Close readers of the text will notice that at the beginning of the Torah portion, Pharaoh seems to be inclined to capitulate, saying in Chapter 10, verse 8, "Go and worship your God – and which of you will be going?"

Moshe's response in the next verse rings out through generations for its moral clarity: "We will go from our underlings to our elders, our sons and our daughters, our herds and our flocks, for a festival dedicated to Hashem."

We will see this sentiment reflected throughout the Torah, every time we are instructed to include the widow, the orphan the stranger and the Levite in our celebrations. But this is the first time that it is articulated, as we might say in contemporary terms: "Until all of us go free, none of us are free." As Ibn Ezra comments, Moshe's response reminds us that regardless of age or social station, we are all equally called to sacred service.

Pharaoh rejects this notion out of hand. But it is in this moment that Moshe makes clear not just to Pharaoh but for the entire Israelite people that the liberation project is for everyone. He is not advocating for some elite group to be able to get special privileges, but for the whole community to realize its potential.

It is a remarkable gift for a community to have leaders who serve with such a goal – who see their purpose as ennobling the entire community, not just elevating themselves, or a privileged set of friends. Often, it is the leaders like Moshe – those who never wanted leadership, those who had to be pushed and persuaded, who are the best at keeping their responsibility to everyone at the forefront of their minds.

Our community has been and continues to be blessed with leaders who step forward to serve, not to increase their own power and authority, but because they have visions of what our community can be, and are willing take on the work to try to help us all get there.

Tonight we honor those leaders, the Board of Temple Beth Israel, from the elders (of whatever age) who are stepping down from their service to those newly taking it on. We remind ourselves, and you, our Board of how sacred the work of holding and guiding a community is, and we express our gratitude that you have taken that work on.