

Cursing the Leader/Blessing the Leader • Parshat Mishpatim

In “How Leaders Should Handle Public Criticism” (*HBR*, December 12, 2022), Ron Carucci argues that the more public your role is and the more decisions you make, the more likely you are to get things wrong, and the more people will critique you in ways that are not always just or fair. “The cruel reality of leadership is that when things go wrong, you take a disproportionate amount of the blame.” This can be a hard burden to carry because the rumor mill works overtime. “When you make mistakes, the scrutiny from the broader organization is intensified. Remember, the farther people are from the problem, the less context and understanding they have. They will fill in the blanks with conjecture, projection of their own trauma, and perceived motives for why you did what you did.”

Carucci advises leaders to accept this reality and, as hard as it may be, try not to get sidetracked by the noise. Play the long-game of impact. At the same time, respond with humility and transparency and, when necessary, set the record straight with facts rather than emotions. Respond to the kernels of truth in what you hear, take

I thought of Carucci’s recommendations when reading a verse in *Mishpatim*, this week’s Torah portion: “You shall not revile God, nor put a curse upon a leader (*nasi*) among your people” (Ex. 22:27). Cursing the leader is mentioned in the same breath as cursing God because these are two sources of authority: Divine and human. The natural tendency to question or rebel against those who have control over us or constrain us is constant. The Torah reminds us to keep it in check. On a surface level, this may be prudent advice.

skinned or cold-hearted, Carucci warns. Be your best self even and especially when you feel crushed: “You have to be true to the values you want people to remember you by. If you don’t want this moment to define you, then make sure it reveals who you intend to be.” Moments of intense criticism can also be opportunities to share your deepest convictions.

Torah. Ibn Ezra adds that this law applies to speaking in secret or in public. In other words, the one who curses should try to shift his or her very mindset about the current leadership.

Ibn Ezra also helps us understand the context of this law. It appears immediately after the prohibition that one who lends money must return the garment that a poor person gave as collateral at night and adds a line of compassion amidst a listing of laws: "In what else shall [your neighbor] sleep? Therefore, if that person cries out to Me, I will pay heed, for I am compassionate" (Ex. 22:26). Ibn Ezra examines this juxtaposition and concludes: "The poor man, while in pain during the night, might revile the judge who ruled that the lender should take the pledge."

Sforno takes this prohibition in a different direction: "Even though you may feel that the lender should take the pledge as collateral, the law is not intended to be as collateral. W10 2016 08 01 10:00:00 - Se as collateral ruled that