

February 13, 2009

The celebration of the 200th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birth has put our 16th President's record and life under microscope. What we are learning, once again, from Lincoln's leadership is that it took a resolute leader with strong support from his advisors to heal a nation. As pointed out by Doris Kearns Goodwin, Lincoln's appointment to his cabinet of people with whom he did not totally agree guaranteed that he would hear a steady stream of new ideas that would guide his attempts to restore the unity of our country, even if it took resolving differences on the battlefield. What later presidents learned from Lincoln was that eloquence, sincerity and teamwork were essential to forging a hopeful future.

In the Torah reading for this week, Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, came by for a visit. Jethro had already been Moses' mentor in the wilderness before Moses returned to Egypt to plead Pharaoh for the Israelites' freedom. At this point early in the travels of the people beyond their escape from the Egyptians at the Sea of Reeds, Jethro saw Moses carrying all of the burdens of judging disputes among the people on his own. The advice that Jethro gave Moses was simple: delegate! Appoint other leaders, and there were many from whom to choose, to hear these disputes. Jethro assured Moses that he need not be concerned that these leaders would not judge as well as Moses could. So Moses selected trustworthy and capable individuals who would make decisions in minor disputes, with major cases still coming to Moses. In this way, Jethro prevented Moses from experiencing the inevitable case of burn-out that was waiting to overcome him.

Sometime we need to be reminded that we need not face important decisions on our own. There are always people to whom we can turn for counsel, support and guidance who can help us make the right choice at crucial moments in our lives. Communities thrive when they include people willing to offer their wisdom with others. Sharing insights, coupled with an ability to listen closely enough to sense the true needs of others, can lead us to a strong feeling of fellowship and well-founded hope for the days to come.

-- L'shalom, Rabbi Larry K.