

Eldad & Medad

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

Moses is having difficulty managing the fractious, rebellious Children of Israel. His solution is to empower seventy elders to share the burden. But they need to be very special men and inspired as well. He asked each tribe to send six candidates. But this meant there were two more than needed for the seventy. The candidates are gathered together in the Tent of Assembly but two men Eldad and Medad, who should have been there, were left outside. We are not told why. The Talmud says they were modest and wanted to avoid leadership positions. Although they showed all the qualities of leadership and inspiration, because they chose to remain outside and were talking about leadership and its responsibilities, they appeared to be a threat to Moses's authority.

Joshua his zealous assistant wanted to remove them. Moses said no. "If only everyone was a prophet and all people were inspired by the Divine spirit."

What an impressive man he was. He had no problem with challenges. If the motive was right, then criticism or another point of view was only to be valued. But he went further. His was an amazingly egalitarian point of view. Some people get appointed to high office. Some do not. But everyone can be inspired and be a good person no matter whether they play a public or a private role. Everyone has the capacity for greatness in one way or another. Just as any parent, rabbi or teacher should want everyone to excel even if they disagree.

But maybe his humility came back to bite him. Because both Miriam and Korah would use this argument in their complaints that Moses had to right to elevate himself and Aaron.