

1

Courage: The Daring of Ramesses II at Kadesh

What happened?

The leader

In Egyptian tradition Ramesses II (pronounced 'Ram-eeses') was remembered as a colossus as large as his own monumental statues, the ideal warrior-king whose 67-year reign secured the country's survival as a great power during a period of intense international rivalry. But at the battle of Kadesh in 1274 BC, in the fifth year of his reign, the 29-year-old pharaoh was lucky not to have suffered a disastrous defeat.

The historical setting

Rivalry between the great powers of the ancient eastern Mediterranean was at its greatest in Syria. There, Egypt's sphere of influence stopped at Kadesh, a city built on the banks of the Orontes river. However, there was one great power that always found this frontier difficult to accept. It was Hatti, whose inhabitants are now known as the Hittites, a name derived from the Bible authorised by King James I. The Hittites had expanded their territories

beyond Asia Minor to exercise control over what is today eastern Turkey, Armenia and northern Syria. When King Suttarna sent the forces of Kadesh against Hittite troops operating close by, he was soon defeated and led off into captivity, along with his son Aitakkama. Although this put a strain on Hittite–Egyptian relations, there was no immediate reaction from Egypt. However, Aitakkama’s return to Kadesh as a Hittite ally was less well received, and so the pharaoh Sety I recaptured this Syrian city. An inscription relates how he ‘smote the land of Hatti, causing the cowardly rebels to submit’. The accession of Sety I’s son, the young Ramesses II, seems to have been regarded by the Hittite king, Muwatalli II, as a good opportunity for intervention. So it happened that Ramesses found himself suddenly confronted by the Hittite army at Kadesh.

Ramesses’ behaviour

News of Kadesh switching its allegiance to Hatti had brought a determined response from Egypt. Riding in his golden chariot at the head of an army of four divisions, named after the gods Amun, Re, Ptah and Seth, Ramesses sped past Gaza along the road next to ‘the shore of Amor’, as the Egyptians called the Mediterranean. This impetuous advance was very much part of the young pharaoh’s character, and it set the scene for the near disaster at Kadesh.

For Ramesses was unaware that the Hittite king had set a trap for his forces there. With an army of 47,000 men, including a complement of 3500 chariots, Muwatalli waited in a concealed position. Against this host Ramesses could not deploy so many soldiers, nor were they all available at the start of the battle: the Amun division was just behind him, the Re division was crossing the ford near Kadesh, while the Ptah and Seth divisions still remained south of the River Orontes. The Hittite



Ramesses II, the victor at Kadesh. The war god Montu, with whom the young pharaoh was identified, was a falcon-headed deity worshipped at Thebes. The personal identification became so strong that a cult statue was venerated in Ramesses' honour during his lifetime.

attack came when the Amun division was establishing a camp chosen by Ramesses near the city itself. 'There His Majesty', we are told, 'sat on a golden throne', presumably to receive ambassadors from an overawed Kadesh. Ramesses received instead a rude shock. Two Hittite scouts sent by Muwatalli to ascertain the exact position of the Egyptian army were captured and, after a beating, revealed the location of the Hittite army. 'The King of Hatti', they admitted, 'together with soldiers from many lands, is armed and ready to fight behind Kadesh'.

Ramesses' senior officers were stunned by the news and abashed at the anger of the pharaoh over their carelessness. After a hasty conference, messengers were dispatched to hurry on the divisions still on the march. By then the Hittite chariotry had 'charged the Re division, and cut through the middle, as it was not drawn up for battle'. This collapse almost engulfed the Egyptian camp when in panic troops from the broken division rushed there in order to escape pursuing Hittite chariots. A total rout seemed inevitable, until Ramesses asserted his leadership. 'Then His Majesty rose like the war god Montu and seized his weapons, putting on his coat of mail'.

As the Hittite chariotry surrounded his camp in an ever-tightening circle, Ramesses launched a desperate counter-attack. First, infantrymen were sent to tackle enemy chariots that came too close to the camp, pulling down charioteers and killing them with short swords and spears. Then, taking advantage of this confusion, Ramesses mounted his own chariot and drove into the Hittites with tremendous force. Even though we know how Menna, his charioteer, 'saw the vast number of hostile chariots hemming the pharaoh in, and went deadly white with terror', the counter-attack gave the surrounded Egyptians a respite, which Ramesses used to rally his troops. He also noticed that the eastern wing of the Hittite chariotry was the weakest part, and next he

turned in that direction, a change of tactics that again disconcerted his opponents. If this move, inspired by another of Ramesses' headlong charges, was meant to convince the Egyptians of their ability to hold out until reinforcements arrived, they were right to trust the judgement of their young, inexperienced pharaoh. For the arrival of an allied column from the Mediterranean coast soon relieved the Egyptian camp, leaving Ramesses free to drive the Hittites into the Orontes, where abandoning their chariots 'they plunged like crocodiles face first into its waters'. Perhaps these timely reinforcements had a similar effect to that on the French of Blücher's Prussians at Waterloo, not least because the distraction may have caused the Hittites to hesitate in driving home their attack on the hard-pressed Amun and Re divisions.

Outcomes

Gathering round the triumphant pharaoh, the Egyptian army 'praised His Majesty, seeing what he had done to the wretched ruler of Hatti', although it was severely scolded by Ramesses for leaving him in such a perilous position at the start of the battle. By this time the Ptah and Seth divisions had arrived and the Hittites were discouraged from further action. Muwatalli's losses were largely confined to his chariotry, but without this striking force he knew his infantry was now vulnerable. So he sent an envoy to propose peace, which Ramesses would only accept as a truce, because he wished to reserve the right to reclaim Kadesh and other cities conquered by his predecessors. That the truce more or less held is an indication of a reluctance on the part of the Egyptians as well as the Hittites over returning to the battlefield.

The Egyptians had taken heavy casualties. Yet Ramesses managed to save his army and his reputation as a commander. 'Braver than hundreds and thousands combined, he went into the multitudes, trusting his strength alone',

according to an inscription carved after the battle of Kadesh on an Egyptian temple in Karnak.

Why does it matter?

Facts and myths of courage

At Kadesh the Egyptian army was lured into a trap by local men who had been sent by the Hittite king, 'to speak falsely to His Majesty in order that he might not prepare his troops for battle'. This clever piece of disinformation nearly cost Egypt dear, because it was only the last-minute capture of the two Hittite scouts that revealed the true military situation. That Ramesses saved the day through his undoubted courage there is no question: after the battle he was hailed by his troops as a great war leader. Though he acknowledged their praise and gratitude, the young pharaoh knew he had been very lucky indeed. Had King Muwatalli of Hatti chosen to ride with his chariotry, like the Egyptian pharaoh, instead of waiting with the bulk of his forces behind Kadesh, then Ramesses might have found it harder to rally his own men. As it was, Muwatalli left the chariot battle in the hands of one of his commanders. This tactical mistake determined the outcome of the battle, since the king's presence would have stiffened the resistance of the Hittite charioteers once the Egyptians fought back with such determination, following Ramesses' own courageous example.

All military leaders make errors of judgement, but successful ones like Ramesses are capable of recovering from potential calamity. At a recent leadership training course, delegates were asked in advance to identify one leader for whom they had particular respect and admiration. They identified a range of contemporary and historical figures.

Among the less predictable responses were Bobby Moore, who captained the England soccer team to World Cup victory in 1966, and General Slim, leader of Britain's 'Forgotten Army' in Burma during the Second World War. The most commonly cited names included Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, Horatio Nelson, Margaret Thatcher, Nelson Mandela, Aung San Sui Kyi (the Burmese democracy movement leader) as well as Martin Luther King and Rosa Smith from the civil rights movement. Although a smattering of sports stars appeared in the list, there was scarcely a mention of a leader from the world of business or the public sector. The justifications for these choices varied and many of the characteristics pinpointed will feature in later chapters of this book. However, one aspect of behaviour mentioned over and over again was the fact that their chosen leader had shown exceptional bravery: he or she had demonstrated real courage through relentlessly difficult times and had, in the end, won through against the odds. In discussion it also became clear that what was felt to be admirable about these leaders was not some form of unthinking recklessness, but rather a sort of moral courage which flowed from a powerful sense of purpose and, as frequently, from a desire to improve the lot of other people.

In implementing a significant change in an organisation, or in driving a substantial project, progress rarely runs as smoothly as the carefully wrought plans originally envisioned. The basis of decisions which may well have seemed wholly rational and coherent when first made can quickly come to appear questionable when unforeseen challenges, or changes forced onto the agenda by unanticipated external factors, adversely impact on the pace or direction of the development. Under these circumstances the shared enthusiasm and dedication shown by a project team in the early stages of an initiative can dissipate rapidly, to be replaced by disillusionment, disappointment and, perhaps most damaging, by the search for scapegoats to blame for likely failure. The determination

and courage of a leader to steer a contentious change through difficult and complex challenges can be vital in maintaining the commitment of team members to the task. Such courage associates the leader closely with the task itself in the eyes of the organisation and is at its most purposeful when the leader's commitment is based upon a genuine conviction in the underlying aims of the project.

The relevance of courage to leadership

How applicable the personal histories of the sort of exemplary leaders named above are to the everyday world of organisational management might at first appear questionable. Though their stories are clearly inspirational, what manager could feel anything but daunted if measured too rigorously against their achievements? There are echoes here of what is sometimes termed the 'Great Man' (and it almost always was a man!) theory of leadership. Familiar to students of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this thinking is based around the belief that a few men are gifted with particular innate skills at birth, inexplicable to lesser mortals and certainly impossible to learn, which make them fated to be our leaders, our heroes. But do organisations need heroes any longer? As Peter Senge says in *The Fifth Discipline*,

Our prevailing leadership myths are still captured by the image of the captain of cavalry leading the charge to rescue the settlers from the attacking Indians. So long as such myths prevail, they reinforce a focus on short-term events and charismatic heroes rather than on systematic forces and collective learning.

Charisma certainly was an important feature of Ramesses II's character, judging from his image and reputation, but equally evident in accounts of his actions at Kadesh were the rather less attractive personal characteristics of arrogance and impetuosity! In common with some of the

other leaders already mentioned, Ramesses II came perilously close to total disaster at his great testing ground. That he turned what looked like inevitable humiliation and defeat into victory is testimony to his exceptional courage, even if it was undoubtedly born of desperation. If a lesson is to be learnt from this pharaoh it is that a leader cannot shirk the responsibility for his actions, and especially at the point of crisis. There is a time for sitting on the golden throne and a time to get out in front of the troops in a chariot and show them what really has to be done. Literally, to take the lead.

This is why courage remains a key element in the leadership mix, and not just at times of crisis. Because all organisations work in uncertain and turbulent times, they need leaders who are willing to put their own credibility in the balance and dare to volunteer for personally risky missions. Visibility always makes a person vulnerable, yet we all respect and look to leaders who take decisions on their own initiative and then stand up for them. According to one management thinker, D.M. Woolfe, in his *Executive Integrity, the search for high human values in organizational life*,

It takes a special kind of courage to stay in tune with your feelings when those feelings conflict and seem to work against you . . . It takes courage to live by one's beliefs and values, to persist in actions that run the risk of failure or the hostility and rejection from others.

What does it mean for you?

The modern expectation, indeed the imperative for leaders, is that they are fiercely demanding of the organisations they lead, yet at the same time display considerable humility when dealing with the people they lead. They need to be both strong willed and empowering.

This difficult and demanding model of leadership takes a great deal of courage to implement; as in the old model, a strong will invariably meant directive behaviour. In other words 'I tell you what I want and I will tell you what to do', compared to 'I tell you what I believe this organisation can achieve, you tell me how we are going to do it'.

Therefore in today's context courage can be defined as having the confidence in one's own capability and judgement. It means understanding the risks and taking responsibility for the outcomes, however surprising they may be. It also means taking risks, both for the leader and the led, something Ramesses quickly appreciated in the crisis facing the Egyptian army at Kadesh.

Even though in the heat of battle Ramesses did not have the time to do so, it really does help when you are about to make a big bold decision, to capture the facts first on paper. You can quite easily end up with a 10-page analysis which is no use to anyone, so rather aim to get all the key facts on a single sheet of paper, as shown in Figure 1.1.

Project:		
What is the current situation (AS-IS)?	What is the future situation look like (TO-BE)?	What changes do I need to make?
What support will I get?	What barriers will I find?	What actions do I need to take?
What are the risks?	How can I reduce these risks?	How confident am I in achieving my aims? Scale of 1–10 My assessment =

Figure 1.1 Project analysis

Now review the following case study, and see how such a project analysis can be used.

Oshito had jumped at the opportunity to leave his native Japan and take an expatriate job in South Africa. He had previously visited the country with a group of automotive engineers five years after Nelson Mandela had taken over the leadership of the country. These were exciting times and he had fallen into the feeling of hopefulness that embraced the country. Now, five years later, he had been offered a manufacturing director's job, which would mean three to five years in South Africa.

On arriving he set out to spend his first six months gathering information and talking to as many people as he could. He made sure he met a good cross-section, from the shop floor to the senior directors, from the sales office through to the union. There was one item that concerned him greatly, and that was some of the key appointments that had been made over the years. In the rush to embrace affirmative action, too many underqualified local people had been appointed to key jobs. The message he got from the old guard was that there was little that could be done, as these appointments were political in nature, and that changes could not be made without causing trouble.

Oshito knew he had to do something to transform the current situation. The business could no longer endure quality scares, missed targets and generally disappointing results. It needed real leaders in key jobs, developing and motivating their teams for a transformation to take place. So he drew up the project analysis shown in Figure 1.2.

Project: Selecting the best		
What is the current situation (AS-IS)? Business results have declined – a key contributor being the lack of motivation	What does the future situation look like (TO-BE)? A meritocracy where the right people are appointed to key jobs and are recognised and rewarded	What changes do I need to make? Assess current strengths and weaknesses
What support will I get? HR director strongly supportive. The business needs to improve results. Potential team leaders who are currently being blocked by the current system	What barriers will I find? Political fears Managers sitting on the fence	What actions do I need to take? Define team leader competencies Assess all current leaders Demote those who do not make the grade (and red flag their current salary) Accelerate the development of potential team leaders
What are the risks? Strike action More demotivation Industrial sabotage	How can I reduce these risks? Early discussions with union reps Give everyone the chance to be developed Communicate what I am going to do in an open and honest way	How confident am I in achieving my aims? Scale of 1–10 My assessment = 8

Figure 1.2 Oshito's project analysis

Having reflected on a strategy, Oshito called all the management together, and outlined his plan to take decisive action to ensure that only the very best were promoted to the key jobs in the organisation. He displayed his strong resolve, but he was also humble in his manner and his call for assistance. He explained that all team leaders demoted would not lose their salaries, and would have the opportunity, if they had the potential, to be trained to do the job. When he had completed his presentation, there was a roar from the audience: every manager in the room, regardless of

colour and status rose to their feet and clapped and shouted with approval. At last someone had had the courage to do the right thing for the business and for the people of the organisation. For Oshito was prepared to select only the best.

