

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

RavFrand

Parshas Pinchas is somewhat of a sequel to the events that happened in the previous parsha [Balak]. In parshas Balak, one of the more sordid incidents in the history of the Jewish people occurred. A leader of one of the tribes of Israel publicly and brazenly had relations with a non-Jewish woman in front of the entire community. People were so stunned by this event that they literally did not know what to do.

The pasuk [verse] says that Pinchas saw this and he remembered (according to the Talmud in Sanhedrin [82a]) the law which Moshe had previously taught—that when an individual is having relations with a non-Jewish woman in public, a person has the right to take the law into his own hands. Pinchas, acting on this law, killed both the man and the woman. The plague (which had broken out amongst the people) then ceased.

The narration in Parshas Pinchas continues at this point: "Pinchas the son of Elazar the son of Aharon the Priest, returned my anger ... therefore I am granting him My Covenant of Peace" [Bamidbar 25:11]. Rash"i here cites a very famous Medrash, which explains why the Torah goes to such great lengths to tell us the genealogy of Pinchas: Some members of the community were skeptical about the use of such brazen tactics, killing someone publicly. They cynically traced his behavior to that of his maternal grandfather, Yisro, who in his earlier years had "fattened calves for idol worship". People began to murmur, "How does this grandson of a Priest of Idolatry have the audacity to kill the Prince of one of the tribes of Israel?" Therefore, the pasuk traced his genealogy to Aharon—his paternal grandfather.

Why did tracing Pinchas' genealogy to Aharon satisfy anyone? Everyone realized that Pinchas had two grandfathers. What does it help that he was the grandson of Aharon? No one disputed that. This would not seem to mollify anyone's complaint—that in this instance he undertook an action which reflected on his descent from a Priest of Avodah Zarah [Foreign Worship, i.e.-idolatry].

The Sha'arei Orah, by Rav Meir Bergman, explains the answer: Everyone knew that Pinchas had two grandfathers, and everyone knew about genes and genetics. But the people analyzed what had happened

and they argued as follows: We know that one of his grandfathers was Aharon. However, we know that Aharon was the most peace-loving man that one could ever meet. He was the quintessential "lover and pursuer of peace." But Pinchas had another grandfather as well. This other grandfather was an idolater; he was into paganism and all that that suggests. So, they reasoned, if we are wondering from whom Pinchas got the ability and character to get up in front of everyone and kill somebody, it seems certain that he did not get this quality from Aharon, the man of peace. Which grandfather, which genes, were coming into play here? It must be the act of the grandson of a Priest of Avodah Zarah!

Therefore, the verse says "No, that is not true!" The genes that were responsible for this action, at this time, were the genes of Pinchas the son of Elazar the son of Aharon the Priest. This is what Aharon himself would have done. One might ask, "But would the 'Man of Peace' take a spear and spear two people publicly"? The Chasam Sofer explains that this act might not be associated with the "Lover of Peace" (Ohev Shalom), but it is associated with the "Pursuer of Peace" (Rodef Shalom).

The terminology of 'Rodef' in the expression Rodef Shalom should give us pause. It seems to have connotations that do not fit in with the context of peace. The Chasam Sofer says that, sometimes, in order to make peace, a person must be Rodef Shalom—chase away the peace. He must, in fact, create machlokes [argument]. Sometimes, the ultimate peace is only achieved through a temporary act of pursuing (i.e.—chasing away) peace.

There are some incidents and situations in life that demand that we stand up and say "No." Sometimes you need to protest "This is not Emes [True], and I have to give up Shalom [Peace] for Emes [Truth]." Aharon is the Lover of Peace, but sometimes he also had to be the Pursuer of Peace. The Pursuer of Peace was acting because, ultimately, that was the way to make Peace between the Jewish People and their Father in Heaven.

The Brisker Rav, zt"l, said in the name of his father, that one would have expected that G-d's reward to Pinchas would have been "My Covenant of Zealotry." L'Havdil [to distinguish (between a holy and a more mundane topic)], if we were going to vote for who was to get the Nobel Peace Prize that year, would the

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candidate have been Pinchas? That would have raised eyebrows!

No one would have a problem giving Pinchas the reward for Zealotry or for Bravery, but the Nobel Peace Prize doesn't seem appropriate. The Torah therefore emphasizes that as much as we would consider this not to be Peace, this is the real Peace. Sometimes the real Peace (of making Peace between G-d and Israel) needs to be made in ways that appear less than peaceful.

We often hear criticism of great Rabbis who take stands on an issue. People complain, "Why do they have to make machlokes? Why do they have to start up? Why can't they leave well enough alone? Is this peace? It's machlokes! It's divisiveness!"

That complaint goes all the way back to Pinchas. Just like there are people in our times that question and say "Isn't Shalom more important?", the same people existed in Pinchas' times. They said, "This isn't Aharon's grandson; this is not peace; this is divisiveness; sometimes you need to just keep quiet and turn the other way!" G-d responds: "That is not the case". Sometimes the Lover of Peace has to Pursue the Peace-chase away the tendency to let things ride and go along without protest.

Therefore, both Pinchas' act and these Rabbi's stands are not acts of division. Pinchas did not receive 'My Covenant of Zealotry'. It was not a act of Bravado. Pinchas, appropriately, received 'My Covenant of Peace'.

Of course, one has to know when to take a stand and how to take a stand. That is why we should not make such decisions ourselves. Throughout the generations, we have always had our Gedolei Olam [World Class leaders] who have known when to say "Now we need to be the Pursuers of Peace". These Gedolei Olam receive the Blessing of 'My Covenant of Peace'. *Transcribed by David Twersky; Seattle, WA DavidATwersky@aol.com. Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org. © 2006 Rabbi Y. Frand and torah.org*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The parsha of Pinchas contains one of the anomalies in the script writing of the Torah. G-d

promises Pinchas the blessing that "My covenant of shalom- peace" be with him and his descendants. The Hebrew word shalom as written here in the Torah has a vav ktia-the Hebrew letter vav written in the word shalom is split and incomplete. Usually a split or incompletely written letter in the Torah renders the Torah itself as unusable and needing repair. But here it is the tradition of the Torah itself that the letter vav itself remain split and incomplete without this affecting the usability and validity of the Torah scroll itself. I have mentioned this matter in previous essays of mine on the parsha of Pinchas but I now wish to concentrate on an insight that recently came to mind regarding this split vav. We all know that there are endless faces and depth to the words of the Torah and that therefore many insights are always contained within one word or even one letter of the Torah. Thus all insights into Torah, based on the framework of the Oral Law and the great commentators of Israel throughout the ages are valid and instructive. The idea that I wish to advance regarding the split vav is very simple but I feel it to be the essence of truth. Namely, that peace is very fragile, almost always difficult to maintain and it requires great effort to keep it together. All of human history bears out this fact. True peace, whether in the home, the family, amongst neighbors, in the synagogue, in the community and certainly between nations, is very hard to achieve and even more difficult to maintain.

The Torah wishes us to be aware of the difficulty in achieving and maintaining peace. Peace is not achieved with glib phrases, populist slogans or even just good wishes and sincere intents. It requires great sacrifices, sensitivity to others, patience and vision as to the future and the possible consequences of current behavior, speech and decisions. And even if peace is achieved it is always a vav ktia-a fragile, split, easily ruptured state of being. Pinchas' act of zealotry hardly seems to be the proper prelude for the Lord granting him the blessing of peace. But the vav ktia teaches us that G-d warns Pinchas that this act of zealotry is not to be a permanent policy of Jewish behavior. The self-same sense of risk and sacrifice that Pinchas invested in his act of zealotry now has to be channeled into the achievement of peace and its continued maintenance. One has to realize how the peace in a family and a community is always threatened by the petty things of life that taken too seriously rip us apart and leave us without peace or serenity of soul and personality. Pinchas will become the kohein gadol-High Priest- of Israel. His task will be to emulate his grandfather, Aharon, to love peace and pursue peace. He will be unable to do so successfully if he does not first realize the difficulty and fragility of achieving and maintaining peace. Only then will there be a reasoned and successful pursuit of peace become possible. © 2006 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs,

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RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“Pinachas the son of Elazar the son of Aharon the Kohain calmed My anger from being against the Children of Israel" (Bamidbar 25:11). What did Pinachas do to calm G-d's anger? He killed the leader of the Tribe of Shimon, Zimri, who was having relations with a non-Jew. This act of zealotry, sticking up for G-d, so to speak, saved the entire nation from destruction (Midrash Rabbah 20:25, Midrash Lekach Tov, Midrash Hagadol). It would seem, then, that the sin that would have caused such damage was the widespread intermingling between the nation and non-Jewish women (see Bamidbar 25:1).

However, G-d didn't get angry until after the nation starting worshipping Pe'or, the idol that these women led them to (25:3). At that point, the plague started (see Rashi), and G-d gave Moshe specific instructions as to how to stop it: set up courts to prosecute those that worshipped Pe'or (25:4). Moshe started to do so (25:5) when Zimri's brazen act interrupted it (25:6). Which raises the following question: If the anger (and resultant plague) were because of the idol worship, how could Pinachas' act, which was not against an idol-worshipper, have calmed the anger?

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 82a, quoted by Rashi on 25:6) tells us how Zimri got involved: His Tribe approached him, asking how he could just sit by while Moshe arranges for so many to be tried and executed for worshipping idols (see Rashi on 25:5, that a full one quarter of the nation's adult males, 150,000, were slated to be executed). Zimri responded by gathering 24,000 members of his Tribe and convincing Cuzbi, the Midianite princess, to publicly cohabit with him in front of Moshe and everyone else. If the trials were for idol worship, how did Zimri expect to thwart the executions through this public display? Was it merely a distraction? If so, the trials would have resumed after the distraction had passed. What was Zimri thinking?

Another difficulty lies in the amount of people killed in the plague. The deaths started shortly after the idol worshipping started (see Rashi on 25:3), which led to Moshe starting the trials (in order to stop the deaths), which led to Zimri's attempt to stop the trials. Zimri gather 24,000 people to help him, and that was the total number of deaths from the plague (Bamidbar 25:9). Since the deaths started well before Zimri's plan, it would seem obvious that they are not the same 24,000 people. Yet, the Talmud (Sanhedrin 82b) seems to equate the two. After Pinachas killed Zimri and Cuzbi, he took the spear that they were still attached to, held it up to G-d, and said, "because of these [two sinners]

24,000 Israelites should fall?" Lest we think that Pinachas is referring to Zimri's helpers, the Talmud continues by telling us that we know it was 24,000 because the verse tells us that 24,000 died in the plague. But if some had died even before Zimri was approached by his Tribe to do something, how could all 24,000 have died because of what Zimri did?

Additionally, the Talmud brings two opinions regarding Pinachas' words to G-d. The first opinion is that these were words of prayer, implying that Pinachas asked G-d that the death toll should stay at 24,000, and that because his prayer was answered, no more deaths occurred. The second opinion is that these words were a challenge to G-d (to the extent that the heavenly angels complained at the way Pinachas spoke to G-d), asking G-d how he could kill 24,000 over what those two had done. While we can understand (putting our above question about the deaths that occurred prior to Zimri's sin aside) how these words can be explained as a challenge to G-d, how can they be understood to be a prayer? He should have simply asked that G-d stop the plague; what kind of prayer is implied in connecting the 24,000 deaths to Zimri's sin?

The worship of Pe'or consisted of things that would normally be considered as a way of disgracing something (see Rashi on 25:3). The Sifray tells us that when the non-Jewish women tried to seduce the Jewish men, they first tried to get them to worship other idols, but they refused. When asked to serve Pe'or, after it was explained just what that entailed, they acquiesced, figuring they were really making fun of it rather than serving it. However, because this is the way this idol was worshipped, it is still considered a grave sin (see Sanhedrin 60b).

Eliyahu Ki Tov therefore suggests that Zimri's game plan was to minimize the sin by rationalizing it. They only agreed to worship Pe'or because their desire had gotten the best of them, and the Moabite women insisted that they first serve Pe'or. Since they were sort of "coerced" into it, and they only intended to disgrace it (not serve it), this act should not be punishable by death. The problem was still that what led to this "coercion" and inadvertent service was their wanting to be with non-Jewish women. Therefore, Zimri tried to undermine the issue of chasing non-Jewish women by publicly showing that it was not that big a deal. He even challenged Moshe by asking him why Cuzbi was different that Tziporah (Moshe's wife-See Sanhedrin 82a). By trying to negate the prohibition against intermarriage, Zimri hoped to restore the act of worshipping Pe'or to being an act of coercion, done inadvertently. When Pinachas showed that the act of having relations with a non-Jewish woman was so serious that one could be killed for it (under certain conditions; conditions Pinachas met), he also showed that the sin of idol worship cannot be minimized,

especially since what led to it was itself a major problem.

It was therefore specifically an act of zealotry regarding being with a non-Jewish woman, which was the cause of the idol worship, that stopped the plague. Everyone now recognized the seriousness of their crimes, and G-d's anger was calmed. But not before Pinachas asked Him to allow the deaths of the 24,000 that had already died be the extent of the punishment. True, they weren't the same 24,000 as the 24,000 that had been Zimri's accomplices in his misguided attempt to minimize the sin; Pinachas was just asking that the ones that had already died, which corresponded to the number who had joined Zimri, be the only ones that died for any of the sins that occurred. He was saying that "over these" 24,000, and the sins they tried to minimize, "[only] 24,000 should fall," no more. And, as the Midrash Hagadol puts it, "if not for the prayer of Pinachas, [the nation of] Israel would have been destroyed in the plague." It wasn't just Pinachas' zealous act that saved us, but his prayer afterwards as well. © 2006 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

An opinion recorded in the Talmud states that prayers correspond to the daily sacrifices offered in the Temple which are mentioned in this week's portion. (Berakhot 26b, Numbers 28:4) It has been argued that this opinion may be the conceptual base for our standardized prayer. Since sacrifices had detailed structure, so too do our prayers have a set text.

Why should this be? If prayer is an expression of the heart why is there a uniform text that we follow?

Rambam (Maimonides) writes that after the destruction of the First Temple and the consequent exile of Jews to Babylonia and Persia, Jews found it difficult to pray spontaneously. Living among people who did not speak Hebrew, a new generation of Jews arose who no longer had the ability to use Hebrew as a means of articulating their inner feelings to the Almighty. Responding to this use of language proficiency, Ezra and the great assembly introduced precisely formulated prayer. (Rambam, Code, Laws of Prayer 1:1)

Here Rambam is arguing that standardization of prayer allows all Jews regardless of background and ability to express themselves, to be equal in the fraternity of prayer the well spoken and the least educated recite the same prayers.

Rambam may also be putting forth the idea that with the appearance of the standardized prayer, Jews dispersed all over the world were united through a structured formula of prayer.

Finally, Rambam echoes the Gemara, which states that Ezra designed the prayer service to correspond to the standard sacrificial service offered in

the Temple. In following this view, Rambam might be suggesting that after the destruction of the first Temple the rabbis sought to promote religious procedures that would link Jews living after the First Temple era with those who had lived during the time of the Temple. Elements of the Temple service were therefore repeated in some form in order to bind Jews to their glorious past.

The halakha indicates that structure should inspire spontaneity in prayer, but Rambam's analysis reveals the importance of standardization. Through the set text all Jews are democratized. No matter our station in life, we all say the same words. And through standardization of text Jews scattered throughout the world are reminded to feel a sense of deep unity with their brothers and sisters throughout the world and with their people throughout history. Prayer then helps bring about a horizontal and vertical unification of our people, unification so desperately needed today. © 2006 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“And the Lord said to Moses, 'Take for yourself Joshua the son of Nun, an individual who has spirit within him, and lay (or lean) your hand upon him, Stand him up before Elazar the Priest and before the entire congregation, and command him before their eyes. And give of your glory upon him in order that the entire congregation of the children of Israel may obey him...' (Numbers 26:18-20)

In these three verses we see the "passing of the guard," the succession of leadership from Moses to Joshua. And imbedded within the three different actions which G-d commanded Moses to perform, we may begin to define three different forms of traditional Jewish leadership. Firstly, Moses was to "lay his hands" upon Joshua, an act which expressed a conferral of rabbinic authority, semikha (literally a laying upon or leaning upon), from master to disciple (cf. Mishnah Sanhedrin 1, 1). Since Moses was traditionally known as Moshe Rabbenu, Moses our religious teacher or our Rabbi, and since Joshua is Biblically and midrashically pictured as Moses' devoted disciple, it is perfectly logical to assume that the first transference from Moses to Joshua was that of religio-legal authority. Moreover, Moses was a great prophet who conveyed the Divine word to his nation; since the scholar (hakham) is heir (and even superior) to the prophet, and since the prophet was always expected to be a great intellectual and spiritual personality, Moses was bestowing upon Joshua his own authority as religious master and prophet (Rabbenu) by the act of his laying of his hands (semikhah) upon Joshua.

Moses is then commanded by G-d to "stand Joshua up" before Elazar the Priest. The Kohen Gadol or High Priest was certainly a leader in ancient Israel-but his Divine service was formal, ritual and external, very much limited to the Sanctuary or Holy Temple. It was necessary for the Rabbi-scholar- prophet to be recognized and respected by the High Priest, and vice versa; however, whereas the former had to constantly bring the living word of G-d to the people and in the process often came into conflict with the ruling authorities and even with the majority of the Israelites, the latter merely had to perform the precise Temple ritual so that the continuity of the Divine service from generation to generation could be maintained. Joshua therefore had to appear, or be stood up, before the High Priest, but he was not given the ritual authority of the High Priest. Moses and Joshua were the seat of religious, moral and ethical authority; Aaron and Elazar were the seat of ritual authority. The Rav-Scholar-Prophet was expected to teach and interpret G-d's word for every generation; the High Priest was expected to ritually perform and maintain the ritual structures from generation to generation.

And finally, Moses was to "give of his glory (Hebrew *hod*) upon (Joshua) in order that the entire congregation of Israel may obey him" (Numbers 26:20). In addition to being religious Rav-Scholar-Prophet, Moses also served as authoritative King (cf Deut. 33:4,5), the chief executive officer of the Israelite nation. This authority was the power, or glory, he conferred upon Joshua as well. Rav Jonathan Sacks, chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom, defines the distinction between both aspects of Moses' leadership as that of influence versus power. Moses, as master prophet and religious teacher, wielded enormous influence, not only in his generation but in every generation, including our own generation which still studies Moses' divine words. Moses, as King of Israel, controlled much power, and so-in the final analysis-managed to quell the rebellions of all of his detractors: Korah, Datan and Aviram, and Zimri ben Salu.

But influence and power are very different sources of authority. The chief Rabbi sees this distinction as emanating from the Midrash Rabbah (Bereshit 21:15), which compares the giving over of power to "a pouring out from one vessel to another," whereas the conferral of influence is likened to "the kindling of one candle from another candle." When wine, for example, is poured from one goblet into another, the first goblet becomes emptied and devoid of its joy-giving liquid. Similarly, when a political leader leaves office and his successor takes over, no authority remains in the hand of the incumbent.

How different is the realm of influence. After the initial candle has kindled its flame onto another candle, the light of the first candle has in no way become diminished; much the opposite, now there are two

candles shining brightly, providing double the amount of light in the room. My revered teacher, Rav Joseph B Saloveitchik, went one step further, when he interpreted the Biblical text of our weekly portion at the celebration of my class's rabbinical ordination (*hag haSemikhah*). The "laying of the hands" is usually interpreted as an inter-generational conferral of authority: the master from a former generation is "handing over" the authority of our ancient tradition (*trado* in Latin means to hand over) to the younger generation.

However, says Rav Soloveitchik, that is not the picture presented by the Biblical text. The Hebrew *Samokh* (*Semikhah*) principally means to lean on, so that the picture being conveyed is that of an elderly Moses leaning with his hands upon a younger Joshua. The message seems not to be that of a young Joshua dependant upon the authority of an elder Moses; it rather seems to be that of an elder Moses dependant for his support upon a younger Joshua. Rav Soloveitchik looked at us, his student-rabbis, with great yearning and expectations. "It is I who am dependant upon you. Without you, my Torah and my unique teaching, indeed all of the traditions which I imbibed from the previous generations, will all die with me. You are my insurance policy. It is through you and your teachings that my Torah will continue to live..."

This is why Moses had to put down Korah-who wanted to usurp power for a false end-but encouraged Eldad and Medad, who were influenced by a Divine spirit. And this is the true meaning of our Sages' adage that a father is never jealous of a child nor is a teacher ever jealous of a disciple. Politics yield power, which disappears in the sand-dunes of times; learning and piety breed influence, which last for all eternity. The Israelite Kings are scarcely remembered while the Israelite prophets and sages are still being studied and interpreted today. Lust for power is ultimately consumed by fiery flames, while the influence of Torah education will enable the light of the menorah to emblazon the path to the tree of life in our return to Eden. © 2006 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

“**P**inchas, son of Elazar, son of Aharon the Kohen, turned back My wrath from upon Bnei Yisrael when he zealously avenged Me among them, so I did not consume Bnei Yisrael in My vengeance.” (25:11)

Chazal comment: "Justice requires that Pinchas receive his reward."

What does this mean? asks R' Yitzchak Yaakov Reines z"l (rosh yeshiva in Lida, Poland and founder of *Mizrachi*). Might we think that Pinchas should not be rewarded? Believing that G-d reward and punishes is one of the fundamental beliefs of our faith!

He explains: We read in Yirmiyah (50:17), "Yisrael is like a scattered lamb." The Midrash Rabbah asks, "In what way is Yisrael like a lamb?" The sage Chizkiyah answers in the Midrash, "Just as a lamb that is hit on one limb hurts all over, so when one limb of Yisrael (i.e., one person) is hurting, all of Yisrael is in pain."

The Midrash continues that the sage Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai illustrated the importance of Jewish unity in another way. Imagine several people sitting on a rowboat. Suddenly, one pulls a drill out of his pocket and begins boring a hole under his seat. The other passengers will surely yell at him, "What are you doing?" Can he rightfully answer, "It is none of your business; I am only drilling under my seat"? Of course he cannot.

R' Reines writes: Both sages, Chizkiyah and Rabbi Shimon, acknowledge the importance of unity. What then is the difference between their two analogies? Chizkiyah's illustration refers to unity based on emotional attachment. If one Jew is hurting, all should be in pain. In contrast, Rabbi Shimon's analogy is based on reason, on the recognition that one Jew's improper act can harm all Jews. (For example, writes R' Reines, world opinion often condemns all Jews for one Jew's act.) We are all "sailing in the same boat." If the boat sinks, G-d forbid, we will all drown.

Pinchas' killing of Zimri was an emotional act. We know this because it is the source of the halachah that, for certain sins, a zealot may take the law into his own hands and execute the offender. The law is that if the "zealot" comes to bet din / court and asks whether he should take the law into his own hands, he is told, No! There is no doubt that one who commits a Zimri-like act harms the Jewish people whether his act is judged rationally or emotionally. Nevertheless, the law that "A zealot may strike him down" applies only when the zealot feels the collective pain of the Jewish People, not when he has concluded rationally that the Jewish People may be harmed by the sinner's act. On the other hand, when a court-appointed agent administers lashes or executes a murderer, he may not act emotionally; he must act rationally.

Since Pinchas acted emotionally, emotion clearly requires that he be rewarded. However, the Midrash says, justice, i.e., reason, also requires that he be rewarded [for in the final analysis, he saved Bnei Yisrael]. (Sefer Ha'arachim: Gmul Va'onesh)

"May Hashem, Elokei Ha'ruchot / G-d of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the assembly." (27:16)

R' Zusia of Annipol z"l (died 1800; a leading figure in the early chassidic movement) asks: Why specifically in this context does Moshe call G-d "Elokei Ha'ruchot" / "G-d of the spirits"? He explains: We read in Malachi (2:21): "For the lips of a kohen should

safeguard knowledge, and they should seek Torah from his mouth, for he is an angel of Hashem, Master of Legions." The Gemara (Mo'ed Kattan 17a) comments on this verse: "If a teacher is similar to an angel, learn from him. If not, do not learn from him." But we have never met angels! How can we know if our teachers are similar to angels? R' Zusia explains: Since we have never met angels, we obviously have never had occasion to ask them to prove themselves. Nevertheless, we believe they exist. Similarly, a fitting teacher is someone whom you would never think of asking to prove himself. Rather, his righteousness must be self-evident to you.

In light of this explanation, continues R' Zusia, we can understand our verse. We read in Tehilim (104:4): "He makes His angels ruchot." We see that angels are referred to as "ruchot." Moshe's request, addressed to G-d as "Elokei Ha'ruchot," can thus be understood as follows: "Appoint a man over the assembly who will be viewed by Bnei Yisrael as an angel." (Menorat Zahav) © 2006 Rabbi S. Katz & torah.org

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week begins a series of haftorah readings which reflect the inner feelings of the Jewish people during their final months of the year. The series consists of moving visions of the prophets depicting the pending Jewish exile and destruction of the Bais Hamikdash and concludes with an ongoing exchange between Hashem and the Jewish people expressing a strong desire for reunification. Our haftorah speaks about the introduction of Yirmiyahu into prophecy and shows him somewhat reluctant to serve as the leading prophet of Israel. Yirmiyahu's concern centered around his young age coupled with his lack of experience in speaking to an entire nation. He recognized the painful nature of his catastrophic predictions and feared that his prophetic words would actually endanger his own life. Hashem responded that He would personally direct Yirmiyahu and protect him from all opposing forces. Yirmiyahu consented and received his first prophecy which he described in the following words. "And Hashem sent His hand which touched my mouth and He said to me, 'Behold I've placed my words in your mouth.'" This unique description of prophecy as "words placed in the mouth", rather than words spoken to the prophet, suggest a strong dimension of force. It seems that Yirmiyahu actually felt compelled to speak his words of prophecy at all costs.

In truth, we find special significance given to the prophetic status of Yirmiyahu. Our Chazal (in Yalkut Shimoni 256) take note of the specific expression used by the Torah when introducing prophecy. In Parshas Shoftim (Devorim 18, 18) Hashem said to Moshe, "I shall establish a prophet amongst them likened to

yourself. I shall place My words in his mouth and he will convey to the Jewish people everything I command. "Chazal reflect upon the words, "prophet likened to yourself (Moshe)" used here which suggest a parallel between Moshe and other prophets. Chazal raise the question that the Torah unequivocally states that no one ever achieved parallel status of prophecy to that of Moshe Rabbeinu. What the nis meant by these words "a prophet likened to yourself"? Chazal answer that these words allude to the unique role of the prophet Yirmiyahu. They explain that there was a clear parallel between the role of Yirmiyahu as the prophet of rebuke and the role of Moshe Rabbeinu. They even draw lines between the life of Moshe Rabbeinu and that of Yirmiyahu. They note tha teach served a full term of forty years and was personally responsible for the ethical conduct of the entire nation. In addition, each of them faced serious opposition from their people for the hard stand they took indefending the name of Hashem. The Mahri Kra in support of this point (see comment to Yirmiyahu 1:9) adds that even the terminology used to describe their prophecy is of exact nature. The Torah refers to the prophecy of Moshe Rabbeinu and states, "I shall place My words in his mouth." Interestingly, this exact expression "I have placed My words in your mouth" is used when describing the prophecy of Yirmiyahu.

As we have now seen, the introduction of prophecy makes direct reference to the ultimate prophet of doom, Yirmiyahu. One could question the high priority that Yirmiyahu's prophecy occupies in the Torah. Why did Moshe Rabbeinu make reference to the prophet Yirmiyahu at the inception of prophecy and single him out from the other forty seven leading prophets? What was so significant about Yirmiyahu's dimension of rebuke that made it the prime focus of Moshe Rabbeinu's earliest discussion about prophecy?

In search for clarification of this point it is beneficial to study Moshe Rabbeinu's reflections on the establishment of prophecy. In Parshas Shoftim Moshe says, "Hashem will establish a prophet in response to all that you requested of him at Sinai on the day you received the Torah. You said, 'I can not continue hearing the direct voice of Hashem and will no longer risk perishing when seeing this great fire.'" "Hashem responded, 'I will establish a prophet likened to you and will place My words in his mouth.'" (D'vorim 18:16) The Ramban (ad loc.) explains that the Jewish people requested that Hashem transmit His messages to them through words of prophecy. They found it too difficult to listen directly to Hashem because of the intensity of His words and opted to hear them through the prophets. With this request they agreed to hear the clear words of the prophets regardless of the severity of their nature. Hashem, in effect, consented to the Jewish people's request for prophecy, reserving the right to address them in the strongest of terms. The Jewish people

readily accepted this alternative in place of hearing Hashem's direct and piercing words.

We now have a clear perspective regarding Moshe Rabbeinu's hidden prediction to the Jews. In truth, during Moshe's era the Jewish people were fully willing to listen to his piercing words of prophecy. This was of course in place of an all too familiar and highly intensified experience of listening to the words of Hashem Himself. Yet in later generations when the Jews would stray from the path of Hashem this task would become extremely difficult. Now that the dreaded alternative of hearing directly from Hashem was far out of sight the Jewish people could be prone to silencing their prophets restricting them from conveying penetrating messages. Moshe, therefore, warned them at the outset that their agreement was eternally binding and that in later years Hashem would send them a prophet whose words of rebuke would be as piercing as those of Moshe Rabbeinu himself.

We can now appreciate the opening words of Yirmiyahu in which he portrayed himself as compelled to speak the word of Hashem. It was the unpleasant role of Yirmiyahu to predict, in the most vivid form, the Jewish exile and the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash. These tidings were so penetrating and dreadful that the Jewish people would react to them as if they had heard direct words from Hashem. Yirmiyahu sensed the intensity of his prophetic mission and felt as if Hashem Himself was speaking directly to the Jewish people. He therefore expressed that Hashem placed words in the prophets mouth and delivered them directly to the Jewish people. In this regard Yirmiyahu was truly likened to Moshe Rabbeinu through whom Hashem delivered the clearest of messages to His people. © 2006 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

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Class Differences

Thankfully, owning slaves is not an acceptable norm in our society. We would be burying our heads in the sand, however, if we did claim that slavery was never an accepted norm.

Ignoring this fact would not only be denying history, but would also be burying an asset from which we could glean how our sages viewed those of lower status - avadim (servants, bondsmen or slaves).

The Mishna describes Rabban Gamliel's response to the demise of Tavi, his servant (M. Berachot 2:7). Following the burial of the deceased, funeral attendees customarily passed before the mourners and offered their condolences. Thus after the interment of Tavi, Rabban Gamliel sat ready to be offered words of comfort and those present complied (Rabbi Shlomo Sirillo, 16th century, Spain-Adrianople-Salonika-Eretz Israel).

Students of the sage looked on in surprise: "But you, our master, have taught us that one may not

accept condolences for the loss of a gentile slave!?" Commentators explain the reason for this rule: Lest onlookers will mistakenly assume that the deceased was a Jew (Tosafot, 12th-14th centuries, France-Germany).

Turning to his students, Rabban Gamliel succinctly responded: "My bondsman Tavi is not like other gentile slaves, for he was a worthy individual." Indeed, elsewhere we find Rabban Gamliel proudly announcing that Tavi was a Torah scholar (M. Succa 2:1).

Our sages compare the long-term affects of our actions. The righteous not only merit favorable treatment for their deeds, but also bequeath merit to their descendants. In contrast, evil people not only render themselves culpable, but also pass on hereditary liability to their descendants. Highlighting the enduring consequences of the deeds of our forebears, the sages note that Tavi was worthy of rabbinic ordination, but because of his lineage did not have this opportunity and never achieved this status (B. Yoma 87a).

Returning to Tavi's funeral: In honor of Tavi's accomplishments in the field of Torah scholarship, Rabban Gamliel felt it appropriate to accept condolences for his loss.

It is important to note that achievement in Torah alone would not justify accepting condolences - a practice normally reserved for family members only. Commentators remark that there is often a familial relationship between masters and slaves, between teachers and students. This close connection, coupled with Tavi's unique Torah exploits, justified Rabban Gamliel's departure from the norm (Y. Berachot 5b).

What does Rabban Gamliel's course reflect about his relationship to slavery? The language of the sources suggests that Rabban Gamliel saw his actions as an exception, and Tavi was generally seen as an unusual slave. It is entirely likely that Tavi, and Rabban Gamliel's relationship toward him, departed from the societal norm. But was Rabban Gamliel alone in his familial feelings for Tavi?

The Talmud relates a similar contemporaneous episode, demonstrating the relationship of Rabban Gamliel's brother-in-law to his maidservant (B. Berachot 16b; Semahot 1:9-10).

When the gentile maidservant of Rabbi Eliezer died, students came to console their master, perhaps following the paradigm of Rabban Gamliel. Seeing the students enter and surmising their intent, Rabbi Eliezer ascended to the upper floor to avoid meeting them. Not to be rebuffed, the students followed their master.

The chase continued with Rabbi Eliezer entering an anteroom and the students at his heels. With his students in hot pursuit, Rabbi Eliezer proceeded to the reception room. Cornered by his students and realizing that the message he was trying

to convey had not been comprehended, Rabbi Eliezer reproached his followers with a colorful metaphor: "I thought you would be scalded with warm water, but now I see that you are not scalded even with boiling hot water! Did I not already teach you that condolences are not offered for the demise of slaves? Just as when a person loses other chattels, all that should be said is: 'May the Omnipresent replace your loss.'"

Why did Rabbi Eliezer hint at the law rather than spelling it out explicitly? As an educator, Rabbi Eliezer could have employed the moment when his students offered their condolences as a teaching instance to lucidly convey the law that comfort is not offered for departed gentile slaves. Moreover, Rabbi Eliezer did not even give his students an opportunity to talk; perhaps they would have recited the approved formula. Instead, Rabbi Eliezer flees from confrontation with his disciples, as if he prefers not to talk about the issue.

During the discussion in the beit midrash (study hall), Rabbi Eliezer may have been able to theoretically relate the prohibition against offering condolences for slaves. Faced with the loss of a member of his household, the sage may indeed have been grieving, unable to face his students who might relate to his bereavement as one relates to the death of an ox or donkey.

A third source strengthens this suggestion. Rabbi Yose qualified the rule that there is no eulogizing of gentile slaves and maidservants: "For a worthy slave, we say: 'Woe for the loss of a good and trustworthy person, who derived benefit for hard work.'"

Rabbi Yose's students were surprised by this statement which sounded like a tribute to the deceased: "If this is what is said for a worthy slave, what have you left to be said for worthy Jews!?" The passage ends at this point and we are left to ponder Rabbi Yose's response to the penetrating question of his disciples. Perhaps the venerable sage stood before the students with a broad grin across his face, as if to say: "Indeed, I have left nothing, for a worthy person should be remembered and acclaimed, regardless of social standing."

Slavery in any form is a blot on our history, past and present. It is worthy to note that our sages - despite owning slaves as per contemporary social norms - did not relate to their servants as mere property. They looked beyond the balance-sheet value of their slaves, seeing real people, having genuine feelings for them and grieving at their demise. Thus our tradition provides a paradigm for moving towards the eradication of class differences. © 2006 Rabbi L. Cooper. Rabbi Levi Cooper is Director of Advanced Programs at Pardes. His column appears weekly in the Jerusalem Post "Upfront" Magazine. Each column analyses a passage from the first tractate, of the Talmud, Brachot, citing classic commentators and adding an innovative perspective to these timeless texts.