

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**P**inhas the son of Elazar, the son of Aharon Hakohen turned back My wrath from upon the children of Israel when he zealously expressed My zealousness amongst them... therefore, I am giving him My covenant of peace” (Numbers 25:11,12).

Covenant of peace!?

At the end of last week's portion, we read that a prince of the tribe of Shimon publicly cohabited with a Midianite princess in front of Moses and the weeping assemblage of Israel standing in front of the Tent of Meeting. When Pinhas saw this brazen act, he seized a spear and pierced the fornicating man and woman to death in the very place of their transgression (Numbers 25:6-8). This was the spontaneous act of a zealous man. Pinhas saw himself as the sole protector of the faith, meting out punishment without resorting to the legal avenues of due process and leaving the testimony of the entire congregation to emerge in a subsequent trial.

Is it not strange that Pinhas receives the Divine gift of a covenant of peace together with the covenant of eternal kehunah (priesthood)? A zealot may be credited with passion, commitment and conviction, but hardly with the desire for peace! Indeed, the Talmudic sages, when characterizing the qualities of Aaron the High Priest, emphasize the quality of peace: "Hillel would say, 'Be among the disciples of Aaron: love peace, pursue peace, love humanity and bring them close to Torah'" (Avot 1, 12). Aren't zealotry and the pursuit of peace two very different values?

To understand why G-d's gift of peace is bestowed upon Pinhas the zealot, we need to turn to the Book of Judges and examine an incident from the later history of the Jewish people, which highlights Pinhas as a mediating peacemaker rather than a fanatical zealot.

Many years have passed, the Bible (Joshua 22) records that under Joshua's leadership, the major conquest of the land has been accomplished, paving the way for the Reubenites, the Gadites and half the tribe of Menasheh to return to inhabit the land of Gilead on the eastern side of the Jordan River - good grazing land, which they had requested from Moses before the battles against the Canaanites began (Numbers 32).

These tribes arrive in their lands and immediately erect an altar near the Jordan, "...a large altar, for everyone to see," (Joshua 22:10) a veritable showpiece. The other tribes of Israel are incensed; they see the erection of a large altar in trans-Jordan - far from the central Sanctuary in Shiloh - as an act of rebellion against the G-d of Israel, a 'declaration of independence' from the rest of the tribes. "And when the children of Israel heard of it, the whole congregation of the children of Israel gathered at Shiloh to rise up in battle" (Joshua 22:12).

But, before they declare a civil war, they dispatch none other than Pinhas the son of Elazar the Kohen, together with ten heads of tribes, to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict. Brilliantly, Pinhas' delegation reminds them of the disastrous plague that descended upon the entire nation when they first began to worship the Peor idol and to cohabit with Moabite and Midianite women. This was clearly a reference to the idolatry which led to Pinhas' act of zealotry (Numbers 12:10-18). Pinhas explains that the building of their altar separate from the central altar in Shiloh will cause repercussions, endangering the entire nation of Israel, a hint that the remaining ten tribes would be forced to take action against them to prevent a disastrous plague from striking.

The underlying motif of Pinhas' argument is the importance of remaining one nation - each responsible for the actions of the other - despite the distances that separate them. In the interest of unity, he tells these tribes that if they feel "defiled or contaminated" by their distance from the Sanctuary, the other ten tribes are willing to take them back to the western side of the Jordan, even though it would mean giving up some of their own land in the redistribution of territory which would have to take place (ibid 19).

The response of two and one half tribes magnifies the theme of unity: this was not an act of rebellion, and it was never their intention to replace the Sanctuary in Shiloh with their altar. They only intended their altar to serve as a symbol of the unity of faith and nationality between the tribes on both sides of the Jordan River. Their sacrifices would be offered exclusively in the Shiloh Sanctuary.

Pinhas demonstrates that he is a successful mediator and peace maker, revealing the essence of his personality as a true Kohen and lover of peace who, when younger, had been forced by extreme

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circumstances to act out of character and behave as a zealot.

With this in mind, let us review the events in the Book of Numbers: the Israelites have begun to commit harlotry with the Moabite women, justifying their immorality by attaching themselves to the hedonistic, idolatrous philosophy of Ba'al Pe'or: "it's good if it feels good, whatever is natural is positive." G-d then instructs Moses, and Moses instructs the judges, to execute all the leaders of this idolatrous wave.

But at that very moment, a prince of the tribe of Shimon publicly fornicates with a Midianite woman - daring Moses, whose own wife was a Midianite - to enforce a punishment against him! Moses is momentarily paralyzed, unable to act or even to speak. The entire nation is aghast at the flagrant, impudent rebellion; the elders are weeping at the Tent of Meeting. Pinchas, usually a respected and peaceful mediator, understands that if he does not act at once, Moses and his Divine laws will have been silenced and Jewish history will end almost before it begins. This forces Pinchas to act out of character for the ultimate good - and peace - of Israel.

But perhaps there is an alternative perspective. Perhaps Pinchas was always a zealot but, because in a moment of truth, he acted in a way that saved the nation, G-d granted him the gift of peace, which is truly the goal of Israel and the covenant of compassion.

Whatever the true character of Pinchas was, one message is clear. Even if an exceptional, momentary act of zealotry is necessary in extreme circumstances, fanaticism must neither be our national norm, nor our national goal. Our norm and our goal must always be in line with G-d's covenant of peace! © 2010 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“Pinchas the son of Elazar the son of Aharon the Kohain turned my anger from upon the Children of Israel” (Bamidbar 25:11). Several reasons are given as to why the Torah mentions Pinchas' father and grandfather when giving him credit for saving the Children of Israel, with the most famous (quoted by Rashi, based on many Midrashim) being to counter the scoffers who tried to belittle Pinchas

because of his mother's heritage. One of the other reasons given is based on the Zohar, and is quoted by a number of commentators, including Tzror Hamor, Sifsay Kohain (Shach) and Me'am Lo'aiz.

"It is written [in the Torah] 'the son of, the son of' (two times) to hint to us that when Pinchas entered inside the tent (to kill Zimri and Kuzbi) many thousands from the Tribe of [Shimon] gathered against him, and his soul was about to depart from him (out of fear). At that moment the two souls of Nadav and Avihu, traveling without a place [to rest], joined him, and their souls were included within him. [It was] then [that] he (Pinchas) merited becoming the Kohain Gadol, something he did not merit prior to that. And this is [what is meant by] 'Pinchas the son of Elazar the son of Aharon the Kohain,' literally." The Tzror Hamor is telling us that after the souls of Nadav and Avihu, Aharon's sons who had died when they "came too close to G-d" (Vayikra 16:1), entered the body of Pinchas, besides being the "son of Elazar," he was now also the "son of Aharon." Read this way, the words "the son of Aharon the Kohain" are not referring to Elazar (even though he was also Aharon's son), but to Pinchas ("Pinchas, who was the son of Elazar and the son Aharon the Kohain, successfully calmed G-d's anger, thus preventing G-d's anger from wiping out the Children of Israel").

Sifsay Kohain gives a few more details, including that the Tribe of Shimon gathered together with the intention of killing Pinchas. Whereas Tzror Hamor says that Pinchas' soul was "about to depart," according to Sifsay Kohain it did depart, as a body cannot house more than one soul. "And even though they (Nadav and Avihu) are two, since they never married, each of them is only considered a half." What about Pinchas's soul, where did it go? "When his soul departed, that body died, and [his] soul became a body compared to the souls of Nadav and Avihu." Although I can't say I know what this means exactly, the way I envision it, when Pinchas' soul left his body, the body's "life force" ("nefesh," as opposed to "neshama," bearing in mind that animals also have a "nefesh," but not a "neshama") expired, and what had been Pinchas' "soul" ("neshama") became the body's "life force" after the "souls" of Nadav and Avihu entered it. Be that as it may, this scenario (the Shach says) enabled Pinchas (who became Elyahau HaNavi) to live forever, as his "body" had already died, and his "soul," which can live forever, now served as his "body" (or, the way I am explaining it, his "life force," which must perish, already had, while his "soul," which became his "life force," continued for eternity).

Matanos Kehunah, commenting on Bamidbar Rabbah (21:3), quotes from the Rambam's essay on resurrection (although it doesn't appear in our editions) with a different version of the events, meant to explain how Pinchas could live forever. "It is said in a Midrash that when they (the mob from the Tribe of Shimon)

came upon him (Pinachas) to kill him, his soul departed due to his fear of them, and he was left as dead and they abandoned him there (i.e. they saw that he had already died, and they didn't need to actually kill him). And the souls of Nadav and Avihu, who were still floating there (despite it being 38 years later!), realized what was going on and returned his soul to him while [his body] was still warm, and he lived. And since his soul had left [his body], the decree against Adam (i.e. death) had been fulfilled, and it was therefore appropriate that he no longer had to experience death." Although according to this version the souls of Nadav and Avihu didn't enter Pinachas, we can still apply this reason for why Pinachas/Eliyahu never died to the Zohar's version.

Minchas Eliyahu (R' Eli Steinberg, shlita) quotes from Matok Midavash (a commentary on the Zohar) who quotes Ramak: "Because of the zealous act that Pinachas did, he merited having the souls of Nadav and Avihu, who were lost without being fixed, join with him, and he (Pinachas) completed them and they became fixed through him." Although Tzror Hamor implies that the souls of Nadav and Avihu, having no place to "go," took advantage of the situation created when Pinachas' soul left his body and found a place to reside (not that they entered in order to "fix" what they had "broken," or left "unfixed," during their lifetimes), the Ramak understands their entering Pinachas' body to be a means of "fixing" their "broken" souls. This fits with the wording of Me'am Lo'az, who says that G-d "sent" the souls of Nadav and Avihu to enter Pinachas' vacated body; it seems more likely that G-d was giving them the opportunity to "fix" what was "unfixed" rather than His playing real estate agent, finding a place for their souls to dwell.

If Nadav and Avihu entered Pinachas' body in order to "fix" what was "unfixed," it follows (Minchas Eliyahu continues) that Pinachas' actions in this situation were the means to "fix" things. But how did Pinachas killing Zimri and Kuzbi "fix" what Nadav and Avihu had "broken" by bringing a "strange fire" (Vayikra 10:1)? One of the reasons Chazal (Eruvin 63a) give for Nadav and Avihu being punished with death is that they decided a matter of Jewish law (concluding that despite the heavenly fire descending, a fire started by people was necessary) even though Moshe, their Rabbi (teacher) was there, and should have been consulted. Based on this, Minchas Eliyahu suggests that since killing someone who is having relations with a gentile is done without first consulting the teacher (see Rashi on Sanhedrin 82a), by joining Pinachas in killing Zimri and Kuzbi, Nadav and Avihu "fixed" what they had "broken" during their lifetimes.

Besides the fact that there are so many other approaches to explain what Nadav and Avihu's sin was, and that the Talmud (ibid) tells us that Pinachas did, in fact, consult with Moshe first, two other factors make this approach difficult to accept. First of all, the way to

"fix" something that is "broken" is to do just the opposite of what had previously been done, i.e. be in a situation that Moshe should be consulted and (this time) do so. If anything, then, it would be the fact that Pinachas did consult with Moshe even though he didn't have to (or perhaps shouldn't have) that could "fix" not having consulted Moshe when he should have been. Obviously, though, this had nothing to do with Nadav and Avihu, since their souls didn't enter the scene until after Pinachas had already consulted with Moshe and was told that he should proceed. Additionally, even if they could "fix" what was "broken" by doing something the teacher can't be consulted about, Pinachas had already decided to go ahead and kill the sinners before his soul left (or almost left) his body. It was during his attempt to carry out this decision, when the members of the Tribe of Shimon tried to kill him, that the souls of Nadav and Avihu were able to join Pinachas in his heroic mission. They helped Pinachas carry out his decision, not make it, so can't be given credit for deciding to do something that worked beyond the guidelines of consulting the teacher. (It could be suggested that they also had to decide to "do" this thing, but the context, especially if they were "sent" by G-d to complete the mission, indicates that the only role they played was helping Pinachas carry out what had already been decided. And, in this case, by the time they joined Pinachas there was no way they could have consulted Moshe.)

In 5763 (www.RabbiDMK.posterous.com/Parashas-Shemini-5763), I discussed how Chazal could suggest so many different possible sins for Nadav and Avihu when the Torah tells us explicitly that they died because they brought a "strange fire." I suggested that the reasons given were all contributing factors that impaired their judgment, thus allowing them to make the wrong decision regarding which "fire" should be "brought." For example, had they consulted Moshe and/or Aharon (or even each other), or been completely sober, they would have been better able to ascertain which fire was "commanded." Because they came to the wrong conclusion, bringing the wrong fire, they were punished.

By telling us that they died "when they got close to G-d (Vayikra 16:1), the Torah is informing us that their underlying motivation was to get closer to the Creator, and it was this desire that led them to bringing the incense offering. How it should be brought (with which fire) was the technical issue that caused their downfall, but had their desire to get close to G-d not been as intense, it never would have reached the point of having to figure out which fire to use.

Taking this a step further, had their primary motivation been what G-d wanted (whether He wanted this offering brought, and if so, how) rather than what they wanted (to get closer to G-d), they would have been much more careful about determining what G-d wanted them to do and how He wanted them to do it.

Even though emulating G-d and getting closer to Him is our primary mission in life, it could be suggested that, on their level, Nadav and Avihu sinned by trying to do so because they wanted to, not just because that's what He wanted them to do.

Pinachas' act was heroic precisely because his "jealousy" was "G-d's jealousy" (Bamidbar 25:11), not his own. Pinachas wasn't motivated by how he was affected, but by how it affected G-d (as it were). It was a purely selfless act, putting his life in danger to take a stand for G-d. It was the polar opposite of what Nadav and Avihu had done, for they put their own desires above G-d's, while Pinachas decided to kill Zimri and Kuzbi because he put G-d's desires above his own. Therefore, when Pinachas' soul left his body, Nadav and Avihu stepped in, completing the task that allowed them to "fix" what had been "broken." © 2010 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Why do we pray with a set text?

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. © 2010 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 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 then is 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 that he 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 in defending the name of Hashem. The Mahari 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.
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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The recounting of the mandatory Temple sacrifices for the holidays of the Jewish year occupies a significant amount of space in this week's parsha. The overall meaning and matter of animal sacrifices has been discussed a number of times previously by me in these parsha articles. But I wish to now attempt to dwell on the uniqueness of the sacrifices that are meant to somehow characterize the holiday itself.

For example, the sacrifices offered on the seven days of Succot differ for each day of that holiday. This is not true regarding the sacrifices ordained for the last six days of Pesach which are all identical. This difference has halachic implications regarding the recitation of a Haftorah blessing on the Shabat of Chol Hamoed. On Succot because of the fact that a different sacrifice was offered each day, the blessing is a holiday blessing and not only a Shabat blessing.

On Shabat Chol Hamoed Pesach the blessing is a purely Shabat blessing. Aside from the halachic implication just described, a subtle message of general insight is provided here. Pesach, representing a one-

time redemption from Egyptian slavery, a great but essentially singular event, repeats its same sacrifice throughout the six latter days of the holiday.

Succot, representing the Divine protection over Israel and all individual Jews, is a renewed daily event which captures the differing circumstances that each day of life brings with it—a new salvation each and every day. Hence, the different sacrifices offered on the Temple altar on each individual day of Succot.

The description of the holiday altar sacrifices for the holiday of Shavuot is also significant. The Torah describes the holiday as Yom Habikurim— the day of the offering of the first fruits of the agricultural year. It also states that a new offering—the offering of the two loaves of bread— is to be part of the mincha offering of that day.

Even though all of the holidays revolve around the natural and agricultural year in the Land of Israel— Pesach is the holiday of springtime and the offering of the grain sacrifice symbolizing the harvest of the winter wheat crop and Succot represents the holiday of the fall harvest season—it is the offerings of the holiday of Shavuot that are most intertwined with nature and agriculture.

We know Shavuot as the holiday of the granting of the Torah on Sinai to the Jewish people. The Torah does not mention this directly but rather concentrates upon nature, agriculture and the blessings of the bounty of the earth. The Torah, by not dwelling especially on the granting of the Torah aspect of the holiday, sublimely suggests to us that Torah is as natural and necessary to us as is the seasons of the year and the bounty of the earth.

Torah is truly our lives and the length of our days and is therefore an integral part of nature itself, the very wonders of nature that Shavuot itself celebrates. Perhaps that is the intent of the rabbis in their statement that the world itself was created in the image of G-d's Torah. © 2010 Rabbi Berel Wein— Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Parshat Pinchas relates a story (27:1-12) about the daughters of Tzafchad, descendants of Yosef (Joseph). These daughters wanted and loved the Land of Israel so much that they wanted a piece of it. As Rav Moshe Feinstein asks, why do they have to have a claim in the land, just because they love it? Wouldn't entering or living in the land be fulfilling enough?

Rav Moshe thus concludes that if a person truly loves something, they'd want it to be theirs, and no one else's. This is why the daughters wanted to actually own a piece of the land, rather than simply living in it. This logic applies to marriages, as well as the Torah's preference that every Jew writes their own Torah (or a

portion of it). In our terms, it's not enough to borrow and read Jewish books. We need to love the Torah we read SO much that we feel the need to own it! As this week's Parsha urges, we should not only seek, read and enjoy words of Torah, but we should OWN those books, and live those words! © 2010 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI YISROEL CINER

Parsha Insights

This week we read Parshas Pinchas. At the end of last week's parsha, Bilaam, knowing that Hashem despises immorality, advised Moav to send their daughters to try to seduce Bnei Yisroel. Midyan and Moav successfully followed this advice which resulted in a plague that killed twenty four thousand members of Bnei Yisroel.

"Pinchas ben Elazar ben Aharon HaKohen haishiv es chamasi... bkan'o es kinasi {Pinchas, the son of Elazar, the son of Aharon the Kohen turned away My anger... by avenging my vengeance} [25:11]."

Pinchas acted courageously and zealously to stop the immorality that was going on around him and thus caused the cessation of the plague.

We are taught that tzedakah {charity} exemplified by the machatzis ha'shekel {half shekel coin donated toward the Tabernacle} saves from death. The Gaon of Vilna writes that the word 'machatzis' is spelled 'mem', 'ches', 'tzaddi', 'yud' and 'suf'. The middle letter, 'tzaddi' represents tzedakah {charity}. The letters immediately before and after the 'tzaddi' are 'ches' and 'yud', spelling 'chai' {life}—the result of drawing close to tzedakah. The letters furthest from tzedakah are the first and fifth letters, 'mem' and 'suf' spelling 'mais' {death}—the result of distancing oneself from tzedakah.

Here Pinchas turned away 'chamasi' {Hashem's anger}. Chamasi is spelled 'ches', 'mem', 'suf' and 'yud'. Contrary to what we find by tzedakah, in Hashem's state of anger 'mem' and 'suf' {'mais'=death} are next to one another. The first and fourth letters, 'ches' and 'yud' {'chai'=life} are distant from one another. Pinchas turned away that anger, causing the breakup of 'mais' and the subsequent cessation of the plague. For this he was given a most astounding reward: "Hinnei nosain lo brisi shalom {Behold I will give him my covenant of peace.} [25:12]"

The Sforno explains that the covenant of peace was in fact peace from death itself. Pinchas was granted immunity from the malach ha'mavess {the angel of death}. This is born out by the opinion that the prophet Eliyahu {Elijah} is none other than Pinchas. Eliyahu, we are taught in the Navi {Prophets}, ascended to the heavens in a chariot of fire. With this covenant of peace he never died.

How was the vengeance that Pinchas avenged so unique and exemplary that he merited such an amazing reward?

The story is told (Around the Maggid's Table- Rabbi Paysach Krohn) of a wealthy man, R' Zev, known for his compassion for others. Although he was a tough businessman, he always found a place in his heart for the less fortunate than he who would often call upon him for help.

One day, Shimon, a man who had reneged on many obligations in the past, called to ask for a large loan. Knowing that no one else would lend him any money, R' Zev decided to aid him. He hoped that Shimon would appreciate the fact that he had helped him when no one else would and show that appreciation by paying back the loan on time.

That unfortunately was not the case. The due date came and went without even a word from Shimon. After more than two years had passed, even R' Zev's inexhaustible patience finally reached its limit. He approached Shimon to ask for his money.

Needless to say, R' Zev was completely shocked when Shimon denied ever having received any loan from him. "How dare you deny the loan! I helped you when no one else would! This is how you 'repay' me?" R' Zev demanded angrily.

Shimon remained steadfast in his calm denial, leaving R' Zev no recourse besides summoning Shimon to a Rabbinical court. The judges ruled that in the absence of any document or witnesses, Shimon had the option to swear that he hadn't received any money from R' Zev and could thus be exonerated.

R' Zev was confident that even Shimon wouldn't have the audacity to swear falsely but he once again miscalculated. Shimon calmly swore that he hadn't borrowed any money. At this point R' Zev lost it? "I don't care about the money but how can you swear falsely! Don't even the Ten Commandments mean anything to you? You are a disgrace to yourself and to all Jews!" With that, R' Zev stormed out of the room.

For months R' Zev was still furious. "I don't care about the money but how could he swear falsely?" he would say time and time again.

Years passed and the incident was forgotten. Then one Shabbos afternoon, R' Zev went to the front of the synagogue and made a startling announcement. "A number of years ago I had an incident with Shimon. After the ruling of the judges I criticized Shimon publicly in a very severe manner. Just as I defamed him publicly, I am now begging his forgiveness publicly."

The congregants were stunned. Immediately after the prayers people ran to R' Zev, curious to know what prompted this apology after so many years. He then told the following story.

"This past week I was traveling on business through a far away town. I had some free time so I decided to sit in on the Rabbinical court which was then convening. As I sat and listened I realized that they were judging an almost identical case to the one that I had brought against Shimon a few years ago. A man who had admitted to other people that he had borrowed

money from a certain wealthy individual was now denying it. The judges ruled that he could swear and be free from any obligation. No one thought he would swear but he did. I watched it all happen and it didn't faze me."

"As I was traveling home a thought occurred to me. This man had also violated the same commandments that had upset me so much years ago but now it didn't really bother me. Why had it upset me so much with Shimon but not at all with him? I realized that it really was my money that was infuriating me all along. I kept saying that it was the false swearing and the desecration of Hashem's name but I now see that it really was simply the fact that it was my money. For that I had no right to speak so harshly against him."

Pinchas, the passuk {verse} states, was "kan'os es kinasi." He was avenging Hashem's honor. There wasn't even a smack of his own personal interests in mind. By doing that he rose above the confused mixture of good and evil that we are all comprised of. He didn't need the normal life/death process that we all must endure in order to separate and be re-built in a purely tov' {good} manner. He lived forever.

In order to pray for the redemption we must put aside our own personal considerations-the planned vacation, the IPO, etc.-and be troubled by the incredible desecration of Hashem's name that results from the world continuing in its present state. We must be "kan'os es kinasi" be jealous for Hashem without involving our own petty dealings and concerns.

Once we reach that point, the news of the redemption will be brought by none other than Pinchas/Eliyahu. Informing us that his teachings have finally been learned and internalized as we dance together to greet the Moshiach who will finally teach the world about Hashem. © 2010 Rabbi Y. Ciner and Project Genesis, Inc.

RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

What is the image that comes to mind when we think of the ideal national leader? Someone who has a grasp of the issues, who can see the big picture. Someone who is strong and courageous, who can hold his own in the arena of international affairs in times of war and peace. Someone who has a vision for the future and the ability to make it happen. Someone who, through his words and actions, can inspire and galvanize his people.

But in this week's Torah portion we find an altogether different measure of leadership. As the Jewish people approach the Promised Land, Hashem appoints Joshua as the successor to Moses. And what is his qualification for leadership? That he is attuned to the spirit of each and every individual Jew.

The commentators explain that this is the overriding quality required of a leader. It is not enough

for a leader to have grand schemes and plans. It is not enough for a leader to deliver soul-stirring addresses to the people. A leader must be able to relate to his people on every level. He must be sensitive to their needs and aspiration. He must empathize with their pain and joy. A true leader cannot stand off in the distance. He must be thoroughly attuned to the most minor requirements of his people in order to lead effectively. For a true leader, there are no little things.

For forty years, Moses had fulfilled this role. During all this time, as he enjoyed daily prophetic encounters with Hashem, Moses was constantly growing in holiness until he reached a point where he was, according to the Midrash, half human, half angel. Even so, whenever the people had challenged the divine will, he had fathomed their motivations and defended them. Even as he ascended from the mundane to the celestial, the gulf between him and his people had never widened to the point where he could not relate to them. Now that it was time for a change in leadership, Hashem chose Joshua who also excelled in his sensitivity to the nuances of each individual's spirit. This was the fundamental quality that Hashem wanted for a Jewish leader.

A revolutionary general was trying to revive the fighting spirit of his trapped and starving guerillas. "If we can fight our way out of this corner," he announced, "I will issue a large bonus to each man. You will have enough money to buy all the bread and meat and fruits and vegetables you need to recover your strength."

The guerillas responded to the promise. They fought like tigers and were able to break out and get away. As soon as they got to safer territory, the general, true to his word, awarded each man his bonus.

The next day, the one of the general's aides stormed into his tent. "Sir, a whole group of the men took their bonus money and wasted it!"

"Indeed?" said the general. "And what did they do?"

"Instead of buying food to rebuild their strength," the aide said furiously, "they spent all their money on tiny tins of caviar!"

The general stroked his chin thoughtfully for a few moments. "Thank you for telling me this," he said to his aide. "It is important information. This caviar must have been very important to them if they would spend all their money on it even when they are starving and exhausted. Apparently, the men need occasional splurges of luxury to help them deal with the tensions of battle. I will make sure to provide it for them in the future."

In our own lives, as we seek to grow spiritually, we must never lose sight of the physical needs of those around us. A great sage once said, "My spiritual need is to serve the physical needs of others." There is profound spiritual fulfillment in bringing comfort and happiness to other people, even on the physical level. But in order to do so, we must be extremely sensitive

and attuned, for as people are different from each other so are their needs. © 2010 Rabbi N. Reich & torah.org

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Bar-on Dasberg

Translated by Moshe Goldberg

The remains at Shomron include some clay tablets containing ancient shipping documentation. Two areas that are mentioned in these documents are called "Noa" and "Chogla"-the names of two of the daughters of Tzlofchad. The possibility that the heritage of the daughters is in the Shomron, to the west of the Jordan River, corresponds to what is written, "the daughters of Menasheh received a heritage among his sons, and the land of Gilad was given to the remaining children of Menasheh" [Yehoshua 17:6].

Perhaps this was a direct result of what happened earlier, "And Machala, Tirza, Chogla, Milka, and Noa-the daughters of Tzlofchad-married their cousins" [Bamidbar 36:11]. The family ties between the two sides of the Jordan made sure that the inhabitants of Gilad would not become separated from the rest of the nation.

