

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Just beneath the surface of this week's parshah is an exceptionally poignant story. It occurs in the context of Moses' prayer that G-d appoint a successor as leader of the Jewish people.

One hint is given in the words of G-d to Moses: "After you have seen you also will be gathered to your people, as your brother Aaron was." Rashi is intrigued by the apparently superfluous word "also", and makes the comment that "Moses desired to die as Aaron had died."

In what sense was Moses envious of his brother? Was it that he, like Aaron, wished to die painlessly? Surely not. Moses was not afraid of pain. Was it that he envied his brother's popularity? Of Aaron, it was said that when he died, he was mourned by "all the children of Israel", something the Torah does not say in the case of Moses. This too cannot be the answer. Moses knew that leadership does not mean popularity. He did not seek it. He could not have done what he had to do and achieve it.

The Ktav Sofer gives what is surely the correct interpretation: Aaron had the privilege of knowing that his children would follow in his footsteps. Elazar, his son, was appointed as high priest in his lifetime. Indeed to this day cohanim are direct descendants of Aaron. Accordingly to Ktav Sofer, Moses longed to see one of his sons, Gershom or Eliezer, take his place as leader of the people. It was not to be.

Rashi arrives at the same conclusion by noting a second clue. The passage in which Moses asks G-d to appoint a successor follows directly after the story of the daughters of Zelophehad, who asked that they be permitted to inherit the share in the land of Israel that would have gone to their father, had he not died. Rashi links the two episodes: "When Moses heard G-d tell him to give the inheritance of Zelophehad to his daughters, he said to himself, 'The time has come that I should make a request of my own -- that my sons should inherit my position.' G-d replied to him, 'This is not what I have decided. Joshua deserves to receive reward for serving you and never leaving your tent.' This is what Solomon meant when he said, 'He keeps the vineyard shall eat its fruit and he that waits on his master shall be honoured.'" Moses' prayer was not granted.

Thus, with their ears attuned to every nuance, the sages and Rashi reconstructed a narrative that lies just beneath the surface of the biblical text. What happened to Moses children? Was he, the great leader, inwardly disappointed that they did not inherit his role? What deeper message does the text communicate to us? Is there something of continuing relevance in Moses disappointment? Did G-d in any way provide him with consolation?

Moses and Aaron epitomise the two great roles in Jewish continuity -- horim and morim -- parents and teachers. A parent hands on the Jewish heritage to his or her children; a teacher does likewise to his or her disciples. Aaron was the archetypal parent; Moses the great example of a teacher (to this day we call him Moshe Rabbenu, 'Moses our teacher'). Aaron was succeeded by his son; Moses by his disciple Joshua.

The sages at various points emphasised that Torah leadership does not pass automatically across the generations. The Talmud (Nedarim 81a) states:

"Be careful not to neglect the children of the poor, for from them Torah goes forth, as it is written, 'the water shall flow out of his buckets', meaning 'from the poor among them' goes forth Torah. And why is it not usual for scholars to give birth to children who are scholars? Rabbi Joseph said, that it might not be said that Torah is their legacy. Rabbi Shisha son of Rabbi Idi said, that they should not be arrogant towards the community. Mar Zutra said, because they act high-handedly towards the community."

Were Torah leadership to be dynastic, a matter of inheritance, Judaism would quickly become a society of privilege and hierarchy. To this, the sages were utterly opposed. Everyone has a share in Torah. It is the shared patrimony of every Jew. Nowhere is this more clearly stated than in the great words of Maimonides:

"With three crowns was Israel crowned -- with the crown of Torah, the crown of priesthood, and the crown of sovereignty. The crown of priesthood was bestowed on Aaron... The crown of sovereignty was given to David... The crown of Torah, however, is for all Israel, as it is said, 'Moses commanded us the Torah, as an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob.' Whoever desires it can win it. Do not suppose that the other two crowns are greater than the crown of Torah, for it is said, 'By me kings reign and princes decree justice. By me, princes rule.' Hence we learn the crown of Torah is greater than the other two crowns."

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This is one of the great egalitarian statements in Judaism. The crown of Torah is available to whoever seeks it. There have been societies which sought to create equality by evenly distributing power or wealth. None succeeded fully. The Jewish approach was different. A society of equal dignity is one in which knowledge -- the most important kind of knowledge, namely Torah, knowledge of how to live -- is available equally to all. From earliest times to today, the Jewish people has been a series of communities built around schools, sustained by communal funds so that none should be excluded.

The sages drew a strong connection between home and school, parent and teacher. Thus, for example, Maimonides rules: "A duty rests on every scholar in Israel to teach all disciples who seek instruction from him, even if they are not his children, as it is said, 'And you shall teach them diligently to your children'. According to traditional authority, the term 'your children' includes disciples, for disciples are called children, as it is said, 'And the sons of the prophets came forth' (II Kings 2:3)."

In the same vein he writes elsewhere: "Just as a person is commanded to honour and revere his father, so he is under an obligation to honour and revere his teacher, even to a greater extent than his father, for his father gave him life in this world, while his teacher who instructs him in wisdom secures for him life in the world to come."

The connection runs in the opposite direction also. Consistently throughout the Mosaic books, the role of a parent is defined in terms of teaching and instruction. "You shall teach these things diligently to your children." "It shall come to pass that when your child asks you... thus shall you say to him." Education is a conversation across the generations, between parent and child. In the one verse in which the Bible explains why Abraham was chosen as the father was of a new faith it says, "For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just". Abraham was chosen to be both a parent and an educator.

Moses was therefore denied the chance to see his children inherit his role, so that his personal disappointment would become a source of hope to future generations. Torah leadership is not the

prerogative of an elite. It does not pass through dynastic succession. It is not confined to those descended from great scholars. It is open to each of us, if we will it and give it our best efforts of energy and time. But at the same time, Moses was given a great consolation. Just as, to this day, cohanim are the sons of Aaron, so are all who study Torah the disciples of Moses. To some are given the privilege of being a parent; to others, that of being a teacher. Both are ways in which something of us lives on into the future. Parent-as-teacher, teacher-as-parent: these are Judaism's greatest roles, one immortalised in Aaron, the other made eternal in Moses. © 2013 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

This week's portion of Pinchas emphasizes different types of leadership - and especially the necessary switch-over from the authoritative, majestic, scepter-staff leadership of Moses to the very different, humanistic and democratic leadership of Joshua. What we must therefore analyze is the difference between Moses's leadership and the leadership of Joshua - and why each was vitally necessary for its respective generation of Israelites. Such an analysis will also illuminate why Moses could not himself bring the Israelites into the Promised Land.

G-d commands Moses to ascend the heights of Abarim (a peak of Mount Nebo) to view the Promised Land below, and then to be gathered to his nation-family.

This is because he had disobeyed G-d's command, "Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them" (Numbers 20: 12) You will remember that Moses had struck the rock (symbolizing the stubborn, hard-as-a-rock, stiff-necked nation) rather than speaking to it as the prelude to the miraculous gushing out of life-giving water from that very inanimate rock. (ibid. 20:11)

Moses, painfully aware that G-d is seeking new leadership, defines what he believes to be the necessary qualities of his successor: "May the Lord, G-d of the various spirits of all flesh, appoint a person over the eda who will go out before them and come in before them [empowering them to follow his lead] and who will take them out and bring them in [caringly, lovingly nurture them], so that G-d's witness-community shall not be like a sheep without a shepherd." (ibid. 27 16-17)

Rashi, commenting on the unique phrase used by Moses to describe the Deity ("G-d of the various spirits of all flesh"), explains: "The mind of each individual Israelite is clear and known to You, and the various minds are all different. Appoint a leader over them who has the capacity to be patient with each of

them in accordance with his unique mind-set and opinion."

According to this interpretation, Moses is requesting that the new leader be a man of the people who has the capacity to listen to and respect the various opinions of the Israelites. He must take those opinions seriously in formulating his policies.

It must be remembered that Moses had assumed the leadership of a weakened and bedraggled slave people under the thumb of a totalitarian tyrant, Pharaoh. Pharaoh's degrading and de-humanizing policies against them had robbed them of any vestige of self-confidence gleaned from their patriarchal traditions.

Moses came to them - and had to come in such a fashion if it was to succeed with them - with the authoritative message of the Majesty of the Universe, the King of all Kings, whose revelation of commandments, morality and freedom was more exalted and enduring than the highest of Egypt's pyramids.

Moses was also temperamentally suited to this style of leadership. He had spent 60 years of solitude in the desert of Midian, communing and meditating with G-d, speaking to Him daily, "mouth to mouth," and developing his spiritual and intellectual capacities.

Moses had become "heavy of speech," involved in the legalism of a jurisprudence dedicated to compassionate righteousness and moral justice, inspired by the theology of a G-d of love, compassion and truth.

Moses, therefore, understandably lacked the patience required of a man of the people. He did not engage in the small talk necessary to painstakingly convince each individual of the truth of the Divine word. He did not have the marketing salesmanship required to tailor G-d's message so that it would be compatible with the opinions of "600,000 prime ministers." He was too close to G-d to have the patience to convince the masses to accept the Divine word.

Moses's hard spiritual and intellectual work on himself had made him a man of G-d, comfortable with wielding the scepter of the Divine in whose Name he spoke. He was, however, impatient with the more interpersonal dialogue, the give-and-take of political leadership. And so Moses, who impatiently struck the stiff-necked rock of the people he had liberated from Egyptian bondage, could not lead them in the next phase of their development, when they would enter the Promised Land as free people created in G-d's image.

To be sure, only a Moses could have succeeded in taking Israel out from under the thumb of Pharaoh; and only a Moses could have gleaned from G-d His eternal words which would serve Israel as their eternal Torah.

For this, Moses, the man of G-d, was crucially and singularly necessary.

But now, as they return to their land armed with self-confidence and their constitution, the Torah, a new

kind of leader is necessary, one who will empower the nation to become G-d's full partners in directing their own destiny. Now a more democratic and sympathetic leader of the people is required; a man "in whom resided the spirit of the various spirits of all of the individuals of Israel." Joshua ben-Nun is necessary - a man who will assume the softer scepter of partnership-style leadership, who will join the input and interpretation of the nation of Israel to the eternal word of the Divine. © 2013 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Lord promises Pinchas that most valuable and yet the constantly elusive gift -- the blessings of the covenant of peace. The world has known very little peace over the long millennia of human existence. Strife and conflict, war and violence, have been the staples of human existence from time immemorial. Many historians and social scientists maintain that war and violence are the natural and constant states of human affairs.

So the promise of peace to Pinchas seems to be a little extravagant, especially since it appears that Pinchas has earned this reward of peace by committing an act of violence and war. Shall we say that a time of peace is merely the absence of war; a negative state of being that only marks the interregnum between wars and continued violence?

We are all well aware how difficult it is to achieve peace and how fragile its existence is when, apparently, it is somehow achieved. Its fragility is attested to in the Torah, where the vav in the word shalom is broken and incomplete. So, we may certainly wonder what actually and practically was G-d's promise to Pinchas -- and how was it ever to be fulfilled.

This perplexing issue is especially pertinent regarding Pinchas himself, who participated in the wars that Israel conducted against Midian and later against the Canaanite tribes in the Land of Israel during the times of Yehoshua and the Judges. Where is the promise of peace present in the life of Pinchas himself, let alone in the lives of the future generations of his descendants particularly and the Jewish people generally?

Many of the commentators to the Torah defined G-d's promise of peace to Pinchas and his descendants as being a personal and individual state of inner being, of what we colloquially call "being at peace with one's self." Pinchas is undoubtedly disturbed by the act of violence that he committed and by the widespread criticism of his actions by many of the Jewish people at that time.

Nevertheless, the Lord tells him that he did the right thing and that history will later thank him for his boldness and alacrity in stemming the tide of immorality

that threatened to overwhelm the Jewish people. So Pinchas acquires, through G-d's blessing, the peace of mind and the necessary confident inner conviction of having committed an act that Heaven and history will deem to be justifiable and correct, even if it is currently unpopular in the eyes of much of society.

President Harry Truman is reported to have said that he lost little sleep over the atomic bombing of Japan which concluded World War II because he believed that he saved millions of American and Japanese lives by his awesome decision. He never again agonized over that decision since he had achieved an inner peace regarding the matter.

Our conscience always disturbs us when we make wrong decisions and pursue failed policies. It never rises to plague us when we have behaved correctly and decided wisely and morally. It is this blessing and reward that the Lord bestowed upon Pinchas and his descendants -- the blessing of inner peace and moral contentment. © 2013 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 AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

After being told that he will soon die, Moshe (Moses) asks G-d to appoint a successor so that the Jews "not be as sheep that have no shepherd." (Numbers 27:17) G-d responds by telling Moshe to appoint Yehoshua (Joshua). In the words of the Torah, "take Yehoshua, the son of Nun, a man in whom is spirit, and lay thy hand upon him." (Numbers 27:18)

One wonders why Moshe did not recognize that Yehoshua was his successor on his own. After all, the Torah had previously described Yehoshua as ministering to Moshe. (Numbers 11:28)

Rabbi David Silber argues that, in truth, Moshe did not want Yehoshua to succeed him. Moshe was a teacher par excellence who reached out to his people with extraordinary compassion and love. Yehoshua on the other hand, sees the world through a military lens where there is a clear delineation of right and wrong. Several examples underscore this difference.

Yehoshua leads the Jews in the war against Amalek. "And Moshe said to Yehoshua, choose us men and go fight with Amalek." (Exodus 17:9) Interestingly, as Yehoshua battles Amalek, Moshe's hands are raised in fervent prayer to G-d. (Rashi, Exodus 17:11)

When Moshe descends from Mt. Sinai, when the Jews worshipped the golden calf, Yehoshua meets him and tells him that he hears the noise of war in the camp. Moshe responds that he does not hear the voice of victory or defeat-rather he hears a tortured cry (kol anot). (Exodus 32:17,18) Yehoshua hears a war cry.

Moshe, the teacher par excellence hears the angst of his people-nothing more than a painful calling out for help.

When Moshe is told that two men Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp, Yehoshua suggests that they be done away with. In Yehoshua's words, "my Lord Moshe, shut them in (k'laim)." (Numbers 11:28). This is the language of the general. Moshe on the other hand, suggests that Eldad and Medad and all others be given the chance to prophesize. In Moshe's words, "would that all the Lord's people were prophets." (Numbers 11:29)

In requesting an heir, Moshe couches his language using the terminology that the people need a shepherd. This was Moshe's hope that the new leader be much like himself-a shepherd of Israel. He could not perceive that Yehoshua, a more warlike figure, was a suitable successor.

It is here that G-d tells Moshe to take Yehoshua "a man in whom is spirit and lay thy hand upon him." G-d is telling Moshe that while Yehoshua, at this point, lacks the characteristics of being a shepherd, if Moshe would but place his hands on his head teaching him his style of leadership, he would be endowed with spiritual teaching.

Rabbi Silber argues that not coincidentally, the Torah at its conclusion, when describing the death of Moshe, points out that "Yehoshua, the son of Nun, was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moshe had laid his hands upon him." (Deuteronomy 34:9) In other words, Moshe had succeeded in teaching Yehoshua the values of the shepherd. The expression, placing his hands atop Yehoshua, means that Moshe had succeeded in transmitting to Yehoshua the vital qualities of a teacher who is soft, compassionate and sensitive.

Powerful leadership is one in which quiet tranquil compassion is at its base. And most important, the test of real leadership is the ability to leave a legacy, to transmit a value system to the next generation. No one lives forever. The test of success is whether one's values and principles can transcend one's lifetime into the next-as Moshe's love, compassion and softness did with Yehoshua. © 2009 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 DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“Our father died in the desert, and he was not part of the assembly who gathered against G-d in the congregation of Korach" (Bamidbar 27:3). As a prelude to their request for their father's inheritance, the daughters of Tzelafchad told Moshe and the other leaders that their father had not been part of Korach's rebellion. The Talmud (Bava Basra 118b), quoting the Sifre, says that the wording used by the

daughters of Tzelafchad referenced three groups; the spies who dissuaded the nation from trying to conquer Canaan, Korach's "congregation," and "the complainers." All three of these groups lost their share in the Promised Land, so before making their case that they should inherit their father's share, Tzelafchad's daughters had to make it clear that their father had not lost his portion by being part of any of these groups.

It is rather intuitive that those who spoke negatively about the Promised Land -- causing the entire nation to think poorly of it, thereby delaying the nation's entrance into it by almost four decades -- lost their shares in it. But what about the other categories? Why was the consequences of those sins also to lose their portion? Before going any further, it must be pointed out that there really weren't two other categories; the Talmud comes to the conclusion that "the complainers" were really a subset of the Korach rebellion. Whether they were the 250 men who brought the incense (Rashbam, Rashba) or those who, after the rebels died, complained that Moshe had "killed G-d's nation" (Ri M'gash; see Ritva for another possibility), they were either part of the rebellion or its most ardent supporters (see Rashash). What was it about this rebellion that caused its participants and/or supporters to lose their portion of the Promised Land?

Rashi seems to connect not getting a share in the land with "causing others to sin." It's true that anyone who was part of Korach's rebellion can be said to have "caused others to sin" if they drew others into their misguided cause. However, this could be said about any of the sins committed in the desert; why was this sin singled out? Besides, a closer look at the wording of the Sifre (upon which Rashi is based) indicated that the expression "caused others to sin" is not meant to explain why the previously mentioned categories of sin lost their share of the Promised Land, but is an additional category; those who caused others to sin, including sins not already listed, cannot get a share in the land.

Netziv (in his commentary on the Sifre) says that for the sake of G-d's honor it would be inappropriate for these sinners to have a permanent remembrance in Israel; it is unclear why this applies more to this particular sin than any others. Meshech Chachmah differentiates between sins whose punishment is meted out through the court system and those carried out by rulers against insurgents, as the possessions and property of the latter are confiscated. This might be what the daughters of Tzelafchad were thinking, but it is unlikely that giving the confiscated property to Yehoshua and Kalev (according to one opinion in the Talmud) or adding it to the rest of the land to be divided among that person's Tribe (the other opinion in the Talmud) constitutes "being confiscated by the government" (as opposed to if it were given to the Tribe of Levi or to the Kohanim). [Anyway, our discussion is about why those involved with Korach lost

their land, not why the daughters of Tzelafchad thought they did.]

Another possibility is based on the nature of Korach's rebellion. Inheriting a portion in the Promised Land is irrelevant to those Levi'im who wanted to be Kohanim, as Levi'im don't "inherit" land anyway. Those firstborn who were upset that their role in the Temple was given to the Levi'im, on the other hand, would have received a (double) portion in the land had they not rebelled against Moshe and G-d. (Bear in mind that Tzelafchad was a firstborn.) It could be suggested that expressing their desire to be like Levi'im so forcefully was tantamount to rejecting the land, since, had they been successful in reclaiming their role, they would have had to give up inheriting a portion in the land. Therefore, as a punishment, they lost the land they wanted to turn their backs on. However, the Levi'im not receiving a portion of the land was not communicated until after the rebellion had been quashed (18:23-24); how could the firstborn be accused of rejecting the land if they were unaware that having the status of a Levi meant not getting a portion of it? [This could be another reason why the nation was now more confident that the Levi'im would successfully prevent them from getting too close to the sanctuary than they were before (see <http://rabbidmk.wordpress.com/2013/06/06/parashas-korach-5773>), as they now knew that being a Levi was a full time job, not one split with being a farmer.]

Although Korach may have had ulterior motives, the "cause" he rallied everyone around was that "the entire assembly [is made up of individuals who] are all holy" (bracketed explanation inserted to explain the transition from singular to plural), so there was no need for centralized leadership -- "why do you (Moshe) lift yourself up over the congregation of G-d?" (Bamidbar 16:4). Those who complained after the rebels were killed referred to the deceased rebels as "G-d's nation" (17:6). Even G-d referred to their gathering place as their "Mishkan" (16:24). Do motivated, sincere, knowledgeable individuals need leaders to help them reach their potential, or can they do it on their own? "Make for yourself a Rav" (Avos 1:6). As important as it is to work together with others as a group, for ultimate spiritual growth having a teacher/mentor is indispensable. Those who joined Korach's rebellion were convinced that such leadership was unnecessary, even counterproductive. (Choosing the wrong leaders would be; one of the main reasons we, as individuals, have to be learned in our own right is to be able to determine who to follow/learn from.)

That leadership is necessary is evident from the very beginning of our Parashah. As Rabbi Moshe Shamah points out ("Recalling the Covenant"), the fact that the plague was killing those who were enticed by the daughters of Moav did not prevent others from sinning. Wasn't it obvious that G-d must be really unhappy with those involved with P'or, since a plague was wiping them out? Yet, it wasn't until Pinchas

stepped up and killed Zimri and Kuzbi that they got the message. Left to our own devices, we can't always see the bigger (or smaller) picture, no matter how obvious it may seem in hindsight. Finding someone to consult with is the only way to ensure a better chance at success. As Moshe beseeched G-d (when he asked Him to appoint a leader to replace him), "G-d's assembly should not be like sheep that have no shepherd" (27:17). We, as individuals, need a leader, and we, as a nation, need leaders.

Once in the Promised Land, leadership would not be easily accessible. Yes, there were "Cities of Levi'im" dispersed throughout the land, contact with Kohanim and Levi'im was necessary to give them t'rumah and ma'aser, and three times a year every adult male had to make the trip to the Temple and interact with the Kohanim and Levi'im in order to bring the required offerings. But being your own boss, farming your own land, has the built-in danger of thinking that you are a self-made man, without needing a superior to help guide you through life. Even though agricultural success does not translate to spiritual success, it is often difficult for someone who is financially successful, and is a "leader among men" in the physical world (even if it just means being the "leader" of the family unit) to acknowledge the need to rely on someone else for other matters. Although those who were directly involved with Korach's rebellion (including "the complainers," see 17:14) never made it to the Promised Land, taking away their portion sent the message that anyone who thinks they can be spiritually successful without "making for himself a Rav" cannot succeed there. Their children, who received a much smaller portion ("inheriting" only through their grandfather (whose portion was shared with all the other grandchildren) and not through both their father and grandfather, would have a constant reminder of the dangers of not seeking religious guidance.

The daughters of Tzelafchad wanted to inherit their father's very large share (three times larger than other shares, see Bava Basra 116b). Before doing so, they explained why having such a large share would not be problematic, as their father didn't have the same shortcomings as those involved with Korach. Even when it came to whom they could marry (36:11), they followed what Moshe told them. (Obviously, making a request of a leader is not incompatible with accepting his leadership.) Once that was established, they could proceed with making their request. ©2013 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states regarding the choice of a leader to succeed Moshe: "Appoint a man over the congregation who will go out before them and who shall come in before them, and who will lead them out

and bring them in; that the congregation of G-d be not like sheep which have no shepherd" (Numbers 27:16,17).

Rashi cites the Sifre which states that the leader should not be one who will behave in the manner of kings who remain in their homes and send their armies to war. A Jewish leader is expected to emulate Moshe who personally led the people in their war against Sichon and Og. The Sifre notes that Yehoshua (Joshua) and King David also led the people in war.

Leadership should not be considered a means of attaining honor from the people. Leadership is both an obligation and a burden. The above mentioned principle also applies to the spiritual battles facing the Jewish people. To be considered a true Jewish leader, one must lead the war against ignorance of Torah which is the source cause of assimilation and intermarriage.

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RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

Life sustaining water, eau d'vivre, bottled at the source from the most pristine and exotic locations line the shelves in every supermarket, each bottled in an eye-catching and enticing container. Apparently, even with the plethora of soft drinks and beverages that are on hand, crystal clear, pure water is the most sought after drink after all. Intuitively, we understand that the more natural it is, the more we can enjoy and appreciate its life-sustaining properties.

In this week's Torah portion we find a reference to a Temple ritual, the Simchas Beis Hashoeva, that was performed with this most elemental substance; pure water. It was perhaps the most pivotal and prominent celebration in the Beis Hamikdash. Each Sukkos, a water libation was poured onto the altar amidst a euphoric outburst of festivities and celebrations that lasted throughout the Chag.

The Talmud tells us that it is impossible to describe the outpouring of joy that accompanied this simple act of pouring water on the Mizbayach. "Whoever has not witnessed the joy apparent at Simchas Beis HaShueavah has never seen true joy in their life," the Talmud states.

Why the unbridled joy that accompanied this ritual? And why doesn't the Torah spell out the details of this climactic event? Why is it merely alluded to in the Torah with the letters of the Hebrew word "mayim" (meaning water) interspaced between the verses that detail the sacrificial offerings brought on the festival of Sukkos. Why is this ritual so shrouded in secrecy?

The Talmud reveals that this special celebration was ordained from the very origin of creation. The Torah tells us that when Hashem created the world, His unity and presence were complete in the world; the shechinah hovered over the waters. Of course, the only thing that Hashem had created outside

himself was the reflection of His presence, as is the natural property of water. The Torah teaches that with Hashem's creation of planet Earth, spiritual and metaphysical forces were given physical expression through what we know as the natural order.

At this time, the Sages tell us, the lower waters cried before Hashem, "We wish to be close to You and One with You. Why can we not be united with our original source in the Heavens (Shamayim, comprised of Aish, fire, and Mayim, water)?"

HaShem pacified the lower waters by reassuring them that they will be unified with their celestial source in a most auspicious manner. On each Sukkos, the Jewish people will observe the ritual of pouring water over the altar, symbolizing the unification of the lower waters with their Heavenly source. This rather enigmatic statement of the Sages requires explanation. How did the waters become reunited with their Source by being poured on the altar? And why was this ritual accompanied with such an outburst of uninhibited joy?

The Hebrew for water, Mayim, gives us insight into water's very essence. It is a palindrome that can be read identically from beginning to end, and from end to beginning. The letter "Mem" always represents a material reality, something that Hashem created outside of Himself. Thus, its numerical value is forty, an expansion of the number four, which reflects the properties from which all matter is composed.

There are four polarities and directions to the world, which is comprised of four essential properties. The embryo is formed into a cohesive state within the first forty days, and the number forty and four hundred figures prominently in many of the laws, rituals, ideas and fact surrounding the material world. For example, the Torah tells us that the waters of the mighty flood rained down for forty days in Noah's time. Moreover, Esav, representing the material world, fought Yaakov who represents the spiritual world, with four hundred men.

The material world is a reflection of the upper world when it is bound and connected with the "yud," the presence of the Divine. Then the water has realized its Divine mission of creation, sustaining and giving life to the lower world with the objective that it bonds with the Upper World, revealing Creator and Creation and truly connecting this world to its Source.

It was this recognition that the Jewish people attained on the festival of Sukkos after gaining atonement for their sins on Yom Kippur and reconnecting with their Divine Source. By pouring the water on the altar they demonstrated that they too, like water, were completely viscous in Hashem's presence, and displayed their readiness to conform to whatever life conditions Hashem would subject them to. This was the highest and most joyous moment of the year for it crystallized the purpose of Creation.

It is perhaps for this reason that the exalted ritual and celebration of Simchas Beis Hashoeva is merely alluded to in the Torah. It cannot be explicit for it embodies a profound mindset that we must arrive at on our own. If we are simply following the instruction manual in the Torah, we will be missing the point. We have attain this lofty level of awareness from our own inner recognition and our yearning to come close to Him.

There can be no greater joy and happiness than that we are secure in fulfilling our Divine mission and mandate, elevating ourselves and the world to the higher spheres and the Heavenly Throne. There can be no greater joy than that experienced when the Jewish people melt into the presence of Hashem and are one with our Divine source. © 2013 Rabbi N. Reich and 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 did the nis mean 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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SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

“The daughters of Tzelofchad approached...” (27:1) The Aramaic translation and commentary Targum Yonatan ben Uziel states: "When the daughters of Tzelofchad heard that the land would be divided among males only, they prayed for mercy from the Master of the world."

What was the purpose of this prayer? asks R' Aryeh Leib Zunz z"l (Poland; 1768-1833). If they were entitled to a share in the Land, they would receive it without prayer. If they were not entitled, how would prayer help? He explains: Rashi z"l writes (in his commentary to Bereishit 1:1) that the Torah begins with an account of Creation to teach that Eretz Yisrael belongs to the Creator and He can give it to whatever nation He pleases. It was with this idea in mind that the daughters of Tzelofchad prayed: "Master of the world! Eretz Yisrael is Yours and You can give a share to whomever You wish." (Kometz Ha'minchah)

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