

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

A true story that took place in 1995: It concerns the legacy of an unusual man with an unusual name: Mr Ernest Onians, a farmer in East Anglia whose main business was as a supplier of pigswill. Known as an eccentric, his hobby was collecting paintings. He used to go around local auctions and whenever a painting came on sale, especially if it was old, he would make a bid for it. Eventually he collected more than five hundred canvases. There were too many to hang them all on the walls of his relatively modest home, Baylham Mill in Suffolk. So he simply piled them up, keeping some in his chicken sheds.

His children did not share his passion. They knew he was odd. He used to dress scruffily. Afraid of being burgled, he rigged up his own home-made alarm system, using klaxons powered by old car batteries, and always slept with a loaded shotgun under his bed. When he died, his children put the paintings on sale by Sotheby's, the London auction house. Before any major sale of artworks Sotheby's puts out a catalogue so that interested buyers can see in advance what will be on offer.

A great art expert, Sir Denis Mahon (1910-2011), was looking through the catalogue one day when his eye was caught by one painting in particular. The photograph in the catalogue, no larger than a postage stamp, showed a rabble of rampaging people setting fire to a large building and making off with loot. Onians had bought it at a country house sale in the 1940s for a mere £12. The catalogue listed the painting as the Sack of Carthage, painted by a relatively little known artist of the seventeenth century, Pietro Testa. It estimated that it would fetch £15,000.

Mahon was struck by one incongruous detail. One of the looters was making off with a seven branched candelabrum. What, Mahon wondered, was a menorah doing in Carthage? Clearly the painting was not depicting that event. Instead it was portrait of the Destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans. But if what he was looking at was not the Sack of Carthage, then the artist was probably not Pietro Testa.

Mahon remembered that the great seventeenth century artist Nicholas Poussin had painted two portraits of the destruction of the second temple. One was hanging in the art museum in Vienna. The other,

painted in 1626 for Cardinal Barberini, had disappeared from public view sometime in the eighteenth century. No one knew what had happened to it. With a shock Mahon realised that he was looking at the missing Poussin.

At the auction, he bid for the picture. When a figure of the eminence of Sir Dennis bid for a painting the other potential buyers knew that he must know something they did not, so they too put in bids. Eventually Sir Dennis bought the painting for £155,000. A few years later he sold it for its true worth, £4.5 million, to Lord Rothschild who donated it to the Israel Museum in Jerusalem where it hangs today in the memory of Sir Isaiah Berlin.

I know this story only because, at Lord Rothschild's request, I together with the then director of the national gallery, Neil MacGregor, gave a lecture on the painting while it was shown briefly in London before being taken to its new and permanent home. I tell the story because it is so graphic an example of the fact that we can lose a priceless legacy simply because, not loving it, we do not come to appreciate its true value. From this we can infer a corollary: we inherit what we truly love.

This surely is the moral of the story of the daughters of Zelophehad in this week's parsha. Recall the story: Zelophehad, of the tribe of Manasseh, had died in the wilderness before the allocation of the land. He left five daughters but no sons. The daughters came before Moses, arguing that it would be unjust for his family to be denied their share in the land simply because he had daughters but not sons. Moses brought their case before God, who told him: "What Zelophehad's daughters are saying is right. You must certainly give them property as an inheritance among their father's relatives and give their father's inheritance to them" (Num. 27:7). And so it came to pass.

The sages spoke of Zelophehad's daughters in the highest praise. They were, they said, very wise and chose the right time to present their request. They knew how to interpret Scripture, and they were perfectly



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virtuous.¹ Even more consequentially, their love of the land of Israel was in striking contrast to that of the men. The spies had come back with a negative report about the land, and the people had said, "Let us appoint a [new] leader and return to Egypt" (Num. 14:4). But Zelophehad's daughters wanted to have a share in the land, which they were duly granted.²

This led to the famous comment of Rabbi Ephraim Luntschitz of Prague (1550-1619) on the episode of the spies. Focussing on God's words, "Send for yourself men to spy out the land of Canaan" (Num. 14:2), Luntschitz argued that God was not commanding Moses but permitting him to send men. God was saying, "From My perspective, seeing the future, it would have been better to send women, because they love and cherish the land and would never come to speak negatively about it. However, since you are convinced that these men are worthy and do indeed value the land, I give you permission to go ahead and send them."³

The result was catastrophic. Ten of the men came back with a negative report. The people were demoralised, and the result was that they lost the chance to enter the land in their lifetime. They lost their chance to enjoy their inheritance in the land promised to their ancestors. The daughters of Zelophehad, by contrast, did inherit the land – because they loved it. What we love, we inherit. What we fail to love, we lose.

I cannot help but think that in some strange way the stories of the daughters of Zelophehad and the auction of the missing Poussin illustrate the state of Jewish identity today. For many of my contemporaries Judaism was like the story of Ernest Onian's penchant for paintings. Judaism was something their parents had but not something that was meaningful to them. Like Onians' children they were willing to let go of it, unaware that it was a legacy of immense value. When we don't fully appreciate the value of something, we can lose a treasure without ever knowing it is a treasure.

Judaism, of course, is not a painting. It's an

¹ Baba Batra 110b.

² Sifre, Numbers, 133.

³ Kli Yakar to Num. 13:2.

identity. And you can't sell an identity. But you can lose it. And many Jews are losing theirs. Our ancestors have given us the gift of a past. We owe them the gift of a future faithful to that past. At least we should not relinquish it simply because we don't know how valuable it is.

The life-changing idea here is surely simple yet profound: if we truly wish to hand on our legacy to our children, we must teach them to love it. The most important element of any education is not learning facts or skills but learning what to love. What we love, we inherit. What we fail to love, we lose. *Covenant and Conversation 5778 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l* ©2018 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

Fanaticism, particularly when garbed in the clothing of myopic fundamentalism, rarely evokes in us a sympathetic bent. How could it, given its association with an uncontrollable zeal and violence for the sake of heaven?

But when we turn to the opening of this week's portion, the Torah lauds Pinchas for zealously killing a Jewish man and a Midianite woman in the very heat of their sexual passion as they recklessly defy G-d's command. For responding so quickly and decisively, we read that, "G-d spoke to Moses saying, Pinchas, a son of Elazar and grandson of Aaron the priest, was the one who zealously took up my cause among the Israelites and turned My anger away from them ...Therefore tell him that I have given him My covenant of peace..." [Num. 25:10-12]

The Biblical summation is certainly one of praise and approbation. Indeed, Pinchas' full genealogy is presented in this sequence; we are also given the name of his father as well as of his grandfather, Aaron the high priest, indicating that the Torah wants to underscore his linkage to Aaron, "lover and pursuer of peace". Moreover, both grand-father and grand-son succeeded in stopping plagues sent by the Almighty to punish the Israelites.

Aaron had been instrumental in stopping the plague that broke out after the Hebrews raised angry voices against Moses and Aaron when Korach and his rebels were swallowed up by the earth [Num 17:6-11]. Pinchas' act of zealotry arrested the plague which had destroyed 24,000 Israelites who engaged in immoral sexual acts with the Midianites [Num 25:9].

When all is said and done, the Torah wants us to look upon Pinchas not only as Aaron's grandchild but as his direct spiritual heir.

And when Pinchas receives the Divine gift of a covenant of peace, it is clear that he is being marked eternally as a leader who fostered peace and well-

being, rather than fanaticism and violence. How do we square this with a flagrant act of zealotry?

In order to really understand what Pinchas achieved, we must view the events leading up to Pinchas' act. I would submit that had it not been for his quick response, nothing less than 'war' would have broken out and Civil War against Moses at that!

The Israelites had begun consorting with the Moabite women [Num. Ch. 25], with harlotry leading to idolatry. They justified their actions philosophically and theologically by claiming that whatever is natural, whatever gives physical relief and good feeling, is proper and laudatory.

This is the idol called Baal Peor, who was served by everyone doing their most natural functions of excretions before the idol, testifying to a life-style which justifies any and every physical expression. At this point, G-d commands Moses to "...take the leaders and impale them publicly before G-d." [Num. 25:4] Only the leaders are targeted, but their death is to be vivid and painful, hanging in the hot sun, their dissolute flesh to be devoured by birds of prey who live on carrion.

What we have here is a repeat of the golden calf debacle which had taken place forty years before. At that time, Moses didn't hesitate to exact punishment. He took the idol of the golden beast, ground it to powder, mixed it with water, and called for volunteers. The Tribe of Levi killed 3,000 Israelites on that day. Moses had only to call "Whoever is with G-d, stand with me" and all of the Levites rallied to his side.

Forty years later, the situation is tragically and radically different. Moses directs the judges of Israel to take action, but when he speaks to them, he changes the Divine graphic description of hanging the leaders in the sun to the more diplomatic, far less aggressive, command that "...each of you must kill your constituents who were involved with Baal Peor."

And then, a devastating occurrence follows: "Behold, and one of the children of Israel came and brought... a Midianite woman in the sight of Moses and in the sight of the congregation of the children of Israel (25:6)." Who was the Jew who dared defy the Divine decree and the authority of Moses? None other than Zimri, Prince of the tribe of Simon, second in line of the tribes, between Reuven the first born and Levi, the Priests. He was obviously continuing the rebellion of Korach,

demanding his rights as a descendant of the son of Jacob who preceded Levi and was now claiming an exalted position. He chose a Kazbi, a Midianite princess – a woman with status and lineage in the Gentile world. In the face of this revolting and licentious defiance, what was the reaction of Moses the leader? "They were weeping at the Tent of Meeting" (ibid). Why was Moses rendered impotent, unable to quell this rebellion against him and his G-d? Because

Zimri had previously gone around taunting the liberator of the Hebrew slaves: How can he forbid sexual contact with Midianite women if he himself took a Midianite wife! [B.T. Sanhedrin 82a].

The Israelite world is considerably changed from what it had been forty years before, during the period immediately following the Golden Calf – the Jews are no longer contrite in the presence of Moses. The Israelites had been told that after the sin of the scouts, the entire generation was doomed to die in the desert. Everyone was demoralized and disappointed. For years after the exodus, no-one stood up to Moses as did Korach. And now Zimri hopes to discredit Moses even before G-d – because of the Prophet's Midianite wife.

The Bible records: " And Pinchas saw...(25:7) What did he see? He saw the people rebelling and he saw Moses weeping. He saw the end of the history of the children of Israel almost before it began, he saw immorality and assimilation about to smash the Tablets of Stone for the second time, without a forceful Moses with the capacity of restoring the Eternal Testimony once again.

This is when Pinchas steps in. In killing Zimri and Kazbi in the midst of their immoral act in front of all of Israel, he quells the rebellion, re-establishes Mosaic leadership and authority, enables Torah to remain supreme. Pinchas has re-instated the covenant between G-d and Israel, and so he is truly worthy of the covenant of peace. ©2018 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Pinchas was introduced to us at the conclusion of last week's Torah reading in a less than auspicious manner. In a terribly chaotic and immoral situation affecting the Jewish people, Moshe and the other leaders of Israel are at a loss as to how to arrest the moral destruction of the people occurring before their very eyes.

One would've thought that a rousing sermon or a prophetic vision could have been the mechanism to help arrest and correct the situation. But instead, Pinchas takes the law into his own hands and before everyone's shocked eyes kills a prince of Israel and his evil and immoral lover.

One can readily appreciate that this behavior would not find favor amongst many. Many, if not all, of the onlookers to the terrible scene created by Zimri undoubtedly felt that some action was required to stop the immorality and the plague that it caused. But no one thought that the action of Pinchas was necessarily justified. To put it in terms of today's political correctness, he used "excessive force." Yet, it seems that Heaven approved of his actions and is willing to

reward him eternally for so doing.

This illustrates a basic concept and value that governs Jewish thought regarding matters of history and behavior. It is what the prophet Isaiah points out to us: "For My thoughts are not your thoughts nor are My ways your ways." Human beings are always left wondering as to the ways of Heaven. In the view of Heaven, Pinchas is a hero who will eventually bring peace and harmony to the Jewish world. Human beings, because of our mortal limitations are unable to fathom as to why this should have been.

The Jewish people seem to have made peace with Pinchas and his leadership role. He appears before us with Joshua and later with the Judges of Israel as one of the leaders of the people in war and in peace and even as the High Priest. Yet he will always be remembered in Jewish tradition for his courageous act of zealotry and for preventing the plague from destroying Israel during this incident with Zimri in the desert of Sinai.

Often in human experience, individuals, even if they live long and productive lives with many different experiences and accomplishments, are nevertheless remembered and always associated with one individual situation and life altering decision. All the later accomplishments of Pinchas, his role in the conquest of Jericho, the tension regarding the vow of Yiftach and the unnecessary sacrifice of his daughter and even his role as High Priest of Israel are all secondary. Jewish memory of the one act that many of his contemporaries did not agree with and yet one that Heaven bestowed blessings upon him and his descendants because of it, is the one for which he is remembered.

We cannot choose how we will be remembered by those who come after us. We can only realize that every act that we commit has meaning and importance and that it is the opinion of Heaven that will ultimately determine the justice and eternity of our behavior. ©2018 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

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. ©2018 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 DAVID S. LEVIN

"Soft Voice" of Rebuke

We find three interesting and contrasting statements within a very short span in this parasha and the introduction to these statements are unique in one particular aspect. We find in Chapter 27 pasuk 12, "Vayomer (and He said) Hashem el Moshe" and in Chapter 27 pasuk 15, "Vay'daber (and he spoke) Moshe el Hashem," and finally in Chapter 27 pasuk 18, "Vayomer Hashem el Moshe." We know from the Talmud and from the Torah that the word "vayomer" is softer and gentler than the

term “vay’daber.” Most often we associate vay’daber with Hashem when He speaks to Moshe and vayomer with Moshe speaking to Hashem. Here we find that Hashem speaks to Moshe in a “soft voice”, vayomer, while Moshe speaks to Hashem in the “harsher, stronger voice” of vay’daber. The Aznayim L’Torah explains that when a person wants to ask a favor of someone important (especially of Hashem) he will say two or three comments of praise and only then will he pose his request. But one who has a request on behalf of the people need not speak softly and preface his request with words of praise. Thus vay’daber, even though stronger, is acceptable and even the second part of the sentence, “yifkod Hashem, Hashem will appoint”, which is spoken as a command to Hashem, is acceptable in this context. Perhaps we could reverse our question and ask why Hashem spoke to Moshe in such a soft voice. The subject matter of the first vayomer was Moshe’s impending death and failure to enter Eretz Yisrael because of his punishment for not sanctifying Hashem’s name at Mei M’rivah. Even in the second case of vayomer where Hashem speaks of the appointment of Yehoshua, Hashem could have spoken in a stronger voice. Yet we see that Hashem did not wish to embarrass Moshe because Yehoshua was chosen instead of one of Moshe’s sons. Hashem delivers His difficult message in the kindest terms that He can.

The Ramban explains that Moshe could have believed that Hashem might forgive him for his transgression at Mei M’rivah. The Torah states before that “to these shall the land be divided as an inheritance, according to the number of names.” Moshe thought that he might still be the one who would divide this land and therefore he would be allowed to cross the Jordan and enter the land himself. Hashem tells Moshe that this Land will be divided, but not by him. Rashi explains that Moshe thought that perhaps his being permitted to give the daughters of Tzelaphchad a portion of the land that he would be allowed to enter the land and apportion the rest of the land among the tribes. HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains that the word v’ra’itah (and you will see) has a letter heh at the end (an unusual spelling of the word) which changes its meaning from a command to simply a foretelling of a future event. Hashem’s intent is that Moshe will be able to choose the time of his ascent (death) in the future and that the B’nei Yisrael will not enter the land until he ascends.

At this point we need to see the rest of the story. “And Moshe spoke to Hashem saying. May Hashem, G-d of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the assembly. Who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall take them out and who shall bring them in, and let the assembly of Hashem not be like sheep that have no shepherd.” Moshe accepts his fate, but as any great leader his concern is not for

himself alone but for the future of his people. They still must enter the land and conquer it, but without a leader they will have no direction. Moshe accepts that his own sons will not become the leader so he asks Hashem to choose his successor.

It is important to understand the exact request that Moshe makes concerning this successor. Moshe calls Hashem “the G-d of the spirits of all flesh.” This description of Hashem indicates that Hashem has knowledge of the intricacies of all men, He understands the problems and the strengths of each. Rashi explains that Moshe is asking Hashem to appoint a leader who will also recognize those differences in each individual and answer each person according to his needs. Moshe has led the people for forty years and has grown accustomed to the needs of each member of his flock. His wish is that the next leader of the B’nei Yisrael will develop that same insight and that same sensitivity to each individual. The Or HaChaim explains that Moshe later asks for judges to be appointed for each of the tribes because these judges will be closer to the people and will understand each individual better than an outsider.

We can see here two distinct aspects of Moshe. Moshe is concerned for his own personal future but just as importantly he is concerned for the future of the B’nei Yisrael when he is no longer there. Once he realized that Hashem had not granted His forgiveness, Moshe immediately focused on the future of the people. His concern for them is clear, and even though he knew intellectually that Hashem would do what is right for the people, he felt the need to express himself and ease his mind. He was not selfish in thinking that only he could lead the people. But he wished to see that Hashem would find a leader for them that would prove to have many of Moshe’s own strengths.

After examining the two incidents of Hashem’s “soft voice”, we can begin to glean a message for our own lives. Hashem spoke softly to Moshe when He rebuked him for his sin at Mei M’rivah and when He found Moshe’s sons incapable of leading the people. One might have expected a much harsher tone from Hashem in both cases considering the high expectations one should have of Moshe and the disappointment at his failings. Yet Hashem purposefully did not indicate anger in His rebuke. Hashem switched to the softer and gentler “vayomer”. As parents or simply as human beings we are sometimes required to rebuke our children or our colleagues. When that rebuke is given in anger or harshly it can cause resentment instead of change. The softer and the more controlled the voice, the greater the child or the colleague can see the sense of disappointment at what was expected. His reaction turns from a defensive position to an attempt to restore his actions to that which was expected of him. The soft

rebuke also conveys a positive view towards the person being rebuked. The child or colleague sees that the person delivering the rebuke has a positive image of them and is only disappointed with the lapse which caused him to stray from that positive image. May we learn to imitate Hashem's actions and speak with the soft voice which shows love and respect even when we must show our disappointment. We should not avoid rebuking when it is necessary, but may we learn to emulate Hashem and only rebuke with a "soft voice".

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YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA SICHAN OF HARAV YAAKOV MEDAN

Adapted by Shaul Barth

Translated by Kaeren Fish

Parashat Pinchas presents two models of leadership: that of Pinchas and that of Yehoshua. Yehoshua's leadership style is characterized by close, step-by-step accompaniment of Moshe, the previous leader, until Yehoshua is appointed as his successor. This process, by definition, entails the new leader assuming his position at a relatively late stage in life. Indeed, according to the Seder Olam, Yehoshua was 82 years old when Moshe passed away.

Pinchas, in contrast, is a young man who, at a certain moment, feels that it is time to act. He embodies the teaching, "In a place where there are no men, try to be a man." In the midst of helplessness and a leadership vacuum, while the leaders of Israel are weeping at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, someone arises -- with no appointment or authorization -- and does something that is not exactly in keeping with halakhic rules, simply out of a sense that somebody has to do something.

I shall not discuss here Pinchas's deed itself. Rather, I shall attempt to learn something from the conduct of someone who was not awarded leadership, but rather decided to take it on. Pinchas acted out of a profound awareness that if he was not going to act, no one else would do what had to be done. Ultimately, God agrees and approves of his action.

When God revealed Himself to Moshe at the burning bush, entrusting him with the leadership of Am Yisrael, Moshe did not acquiesce at once; he first protested. Chassidic teachings attribute this to Moshe's humility. However, if we read this in a straightforward way, we can all identify strongly with Moshe. Suddenly, in the middle of his life, God is telling him to leave his home, his family, his source of livelihood and his routine, for a mission that is going to deprive him of any private life whatsoever.

Moshe argues until God was angry with Moshe. I am certain that if, following this statement, Moshe had continued to hesitate, God would have

agreed with him and sent him back to shepherd his father-in-law's flocks for the rest of his days. For God, a thousand years are like a single day that has passed;" He could wait until someone else came upon the burning bush and agreed to accept the job. Who knows how many times in Jewish history we have lost out on first-rate leaders simply because, at the critical moment, the candidates were not willing to accept the responsibility? History has been changed thanks to people who took charge of the situation around them -- and I am not referring here to the political realm. I refer to people who have made significant contributions in the spheres of security, the economy, academia -- private individuals who have said to themselves, "Where there are no men, try to be a man."

Among the prophets, there were some who continued on the path of Moshe. Yirmiyahu, for example, in the prophecy of his consecration, cries out: "Ah, Lord God -- Behold, I know not how to speak, for I am a child." Yishayahu, in contrast, hears God's voice saying, "Whom shall I send; who shall go for us?" and he answers of his own initiative, "Here I am, send me." This may be one of the many reasons for Yishayahu's success in preventing the threatened destruction by the hand of Ashur during the days of Chizkiyahu, in contrast to Yirmiyahu's lack of success in preventing the destruction in the days of Tzidkiyahu. Not every person merits to hear, with prophetic clarity, the voice of God calling to him: "Whom shall I send, and who shall go for us?" However, every person hears such a voice from within himself, with the clarity appropriate to him and his level, at some time during his life.

Many students of our yeshiva are about to take part as counselors in Bnei Akiva's annual Shabbat Irgun. Bnei Akiva, more than any other body, seems to educate towards hearing God's voice as heard by Yishayahu and Pinchas. It also educates one to answer, "Here I am, send me." The importance of leadership cannot be overstated. In Mesillat Yesharim, the trait of chassidut" (piety) comes only near the end of the process of self-perfection, following after watchfulness, alacrity, cleanliness, abstention, and purity. The trait of piety" is acquired by people of great spiritual refinement, and it demands the highest level of focused behavior, including the performance of commandments for the sake of God, and concern for God's honor. This trait also includes a person being willing to offer himself for the sake of the community, out of his understanding that he is able to provide something that is missing from the nation. This quality is the foundation of leadership.

However, there is also another quality that a leader needs. The secret of Shemuel's leadership is his declaration: "Whose ox have I taken; whose donkey have I taken?" He did not act in order to receive any sort of reward. This is related to the leadership of Yehoshua, which I mentioned above. And now -- fear

God and serve Him, wholeheartedly and in truth... if it seems bad to you to serve God, choose yourselves this day whom you will serve: the gods that your fathers served, who were on the other side of the river, or the gods of the Emori, in whose land you dwell. But I and my household shall serve the Lord" (Yehoshua 24:14-15).

A leader who does not need a luxury car at the nation's expense is also a leader who will not make decisions on the basis of surveys; he will not change his mind in accordance with a prevailing mood. Rather, he will be prepared to lead the nation in accordance with his principles and his conscience, with no need for strategic advisors analyzing how he might find favor with every passing fad.

Leadership therefore involves an inherent paradox. There is no servitude like that of a leader, a servant to a holy nation." His entire private life is devoted to his mission, with no expectation of any reward. However, there is also no freedom like that of a leader -- if he acts in accordance with his principles and his conscience, rather than with a view to finding favor with others.

I feel more than a grain of pride as I mention the General Secretary who brought about the great revolution in Bnei Akiva, transforming it from a subsidiary of the Religious Kibbutz Movement into a Torah-centered mass movement, and led it to become what it is today. He is a graduate of our yeshiva -- a Gushnik" -- named Avraham Lipschitz. He paved the way not only for Bnei Akiva, but also for us, as yeshiva students, showing our power to contribute and to bring about change.

Youngsters in Bnei Akiva are drawn after younger role models who inspire them. Many years ago I came to the yeshiva because of Rav Chanan Porat and Rav Yoel Bin-Nun who, at the time, were more or less the same age as our yeshiva students today. People in their twenties are capable of great things. Bnei Akiva, which presents Torah as a blueprint for a better future, is badly needed today amongst Am Yisrael. Those who are capable of molding the movement in this direction are young people like you.

Bnei Akiva is only one example of the need to invest our abilities in the building of the land and its revival. A few weeks ago, the yeshiva hosted a Shabbat reunion for the members of its 24th graduating class. During the course of the Shabbat I was exposed to leadership at its best and most powerful. I was amazed at what our graduates have succeeded in achieving outside of the yeshiva: one is a pillar of the Ofakim development town, keeping up its morale and its spiritual level. Another, a hi-tech professional, established a sterling community in a neighborhood of Modi'in -- a city that was depicted, at first, as a secular city," but where Torah now occupies a place of honor. Another graduate heads a large

Ethiopian community in Kiryat Menachem, Jerusalem.

People such as these, regardless of which profession they decided to pursue and where they live, have chosen to influence and mold the environment that surrounds them. This concern for the future of Am Yisrael is needed today more than ever before. While for our students this aspiration may be consigned to the distant future, it is a good idea to consider oneself an apprentice in the meantime. In Bnei Akiva as in other frameworks, it is important to assume responsibility.

Within the yeshiva, too, the same idea applies. Take responsibility for yourselves. When I agreed to serve as Rosh Yeshiva, I did so as part of a whole group that is prepared to take responsibility for what happens here. I refer not only to the Ramim, but also to every individual student. Leadership means, inter alia, learning how not to be swallowed up within the frameworks that surround you over the course of your life. It is important that you absorb as much Torah as possible -- and in the manner that will help you build your leadership ability and leave your mark, rather than being swallowed up in the system and its conventions, both in the present and in the future. (*This sicha was delivered during the week of Parashat Toldot 5768 [2007], prior to Bnei Akiva's annual Shabbat Irgun.*)

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Tishbi will Answer

*Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit
by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

With great anticipation we await the coming of the prophet Elijah as described by the prophet Malachei, as he will provide answers to all our questions in Jewish law and current questions to situations at hand. (Some say that Pinchas was the prophet Elijah). This is the meaning of the term "Teku", ("Tishbi Yetaretz Kushi'ot V'abayot")

For example, with reference to Jewish law, when collecting a debt, do we leave enough money so that the debtor would be able to subsist? When evaluating a person's debt to donate to the Beit Hamikdash, we always are cognizant and sensitive that the person who is donating has enough left over to subsist. Does this also apply to collecting debts as well?

The Talmud (Baba Mitziah 114a) decides this question by the words and opinion of the prophet Elijah who appeared and using one of the thirteen principals of derivation of the Torah, answered this question. (As an aside, his view was not accepted by all, and though it was accepted by the majority, it was not because he was a prophet but rather because he was equal or perhaps better in scholarship than the sages).

With reference to current situations at hand, Elijah would be able to adjudicate monetary disputes where the court of law could not and the money was held in abeyance, or he would advise us whether

something has been defiled, or whether a piece of meat that was left unattended (Basar Shenisaleim Min H'ayin) belonged to a Jew or non-Jew. As well, whether or not we could establish a meal on wine rather than just bread, or can we write Tefillin using the skin of a fish. These and similar questions the prophet Elijah would be able to answer in his role as a prophet, may that time come speedily. ©2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN

Be'eros

Be'er Yosef: "The pasuk begs for more information. Having been spared from death, what happened to them? Rashi gives us the fuller picture. 'Initially, they took part in Korach's counsel. At the time of the dispute, their hearts entertained thoughts of teshuvah. A place was created for them at a high place of Gehinom, and they took up residence there.' The gemara (Sanhedrin 110a) from which Rashi takes his comment adds that from the place that they are installed, they sing shirah."

The sons of Korach directly appear in Tehilim. (44:1-2) "For the conductor, on the shoshanim, by the sons of Korach: My heart stirs with a good thing; I say, 'My works are for the King.'" A midrash elaborates. Seeing the Gehinom open beneath them, and surrounded by fire on all sides, Korach's sons could not utter the words of these pesukim. The thought merely stirred within, i.e. took shape in their minds, but had not made its way to their lips. Yet HKBH accepted that thought as teshuvah.

Putting it all together, Chazal's message seems to be that the teshuvah of Korach's sons took the specific form of this perek of Tehilim. Furthermore, we the message of that perek shows the precision of measured, weighed teshuvah, including insights of the authors that directly addresses the source of their sin.

What had they done? According to yet other midrashim, they had been part of a campaign to unseat Moshe by mocking and deriding him. They sought to instill hatred of Moshe into the hearts of the nation, by reframing him as a cruel and power-hungry tyrant.

They now switched courses. In a moment of clarity, they composed an unspoken paean to the character of the true talmid chacham. Thus the reference to shoshanim, to roses. By this they meant, says a midrash, that the talmid chacham is soft like a rose, pleasant like a rose, and redolent with good deeds. In other words, they now sought to praise Moshe, the consummate talmid chacham, and to endear him to the people.

We must ask ourselves, however,



what they meant by soft as a rose. Does not the gemara (Taanis 4a) take an antipodal position, when it says that a talmid chacham must be hard as iron?

The resolution is as follows. In general, a talmid chacham should be soft and pleasant, with the exception of those scholars who occupy public positions of authority. Those who lead, and those who judge, must ensure that their words are heeded. They must speak with strength, and not bend to unworthy opposition. All others, however, should be seen by people as agreeable, pliable and giving, as a consequence of the Torah they acquired.

Furthermore, the distinction between the two groups is not absolute. Every talmid chacham must be at his core soft and pleasant. At times, he may have to assume a persona of unyielding toughness -- but drop it in all interactions with people in which that strength does not have to be deployed.

R. Yochanan Ben Zakai was lauded by his students. (Berachos 28b) "Our master, lamp of Israel. The pillar of the right, strong hammer." We could explain this along the lines of our discussion. R. Yochanan ben Zakai was a leader, a nasi -- the guiding light of Israel. As such, he was forced to assume the role of a strong hammer. Nonetheless, he remained the pillar of the Right, i.e. of chesed, which is often called the "right," or fundamental midah relative to din on the secondary left.

Returning to our pasuk, the sons of Korach, unable in the briefest moment available to them to do complete teshuvah, could not manage more than a thought of contrition. Remarkably, not only did Hashem accept this as teshuvah, but He rewarded it with the clarity and vision needed to formulate shirah that would be used far into the future. (Based on Be'er Yosef, Bamidbar 26:11) ©2014 Rabbi Y. Adlerstein and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Parshat Pinchas relates the story (27:1-12) about the daughters of Tzlafchad, 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. ©2014 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.