

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Moses said to the Lord, “May the Lord, God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the Lord’s people will not be like sheep without a shepherd.” (Num. 27:15–17)

Moses was in sight of the Angel of Death. Miriam had died. So had Aaron. And God had told Moses “you too will be gathered to your people, as your brother Aaron was.” (Num. 27:12–13), so he knew he was not fated to live long enough to cross the Jordan and enter the land. Who would be his successor? Did he have any thoughts on the matter?

With profound attentiveness, the Sages noted the immediately previous passage. It is the story of the daughters of Tzelophehad, who claim their rights of inheritance in the land, despite the fact that inheritance passed through the male line and their father had left no sons. Moses brought their request to God, who answered that it was to be granted.

Against this background, the Midrash interprets Moses’ thoughts as he brings his own request to God, that a successor be appointed: What was Moses’ reason for making this request after declaring the order of inheritance? Just this, that when the daughters of Tzelophehad inherited from their father, Moses reasoned: The time is right for me to make my own request. If daughters inherit, it is surely right that my sons should inherit my glory.

The Holy One, Blessed Be He, said to him, “He who keeps the fig tree shall eat its fruit” (Prov. 27:18). Your sons sat idly by and did not study the Torah. Joshua served you faithfully and showed you great honour. It was he who rose early in the morning and remained late at night at your House of Assembly. He used to arrange the benches and spread the mats. Seeing that he has served you with all his might, he is worthy to serve Israel, for he shall not lose his reward.¹

This is the unspoken drama of the chapter. Not only was Moses fated not to enter the land, but he was also destined to see his sons overlooked in the search for a successor. That was his second personal tragedy.

But it is precisely here that we find, for the first

time, one of Judaism’s most powerful propositions. Biblical Israel had its dynasties. Both Priesthood and, in a later age, Kingship were handed down from father to son. Yet there is a staunchly egalitarian strand in Judaism from the outset. Ironically, it is given one of its most powerful expressions in the mouth of the rebel, Korach: “All the congregation are holy and the Lord is in their midst. Why then do you (Moses) set yourselves above the congregation?” (Num. 16:3).

But it was not only Korach who gave voice to such a sentiment. We hear it in the words of Moses himself: “Would that all the Lord’s people were Prophets and that the Lord would put His spirit on them” (Num. 11:29).

We hear it again in the words of Hannah when she gives thanksgiving for the birth of her son:

The Lord sends poverty and wealth;

He humbles and He exalts.

He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap;

He seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honour. (1 Sam. 2:7–8)

It is implicit in the great holiness command: “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: Be holy, because I, the Lord your God, am holy’” (Lev. 19:2).

This is not a call to Priests or Prophets – a sacred elite – but to an entire people. There is, within Judaism a profound egalitarian instinct: the concept of a nation of individuals standing with equal dignity in the presence of God.

Korach was wrong less in what he said than in why he said it. He was a demagogue attempting to seize power. But he tapped into a deep reservoir of popular feeling and religious principle. Jews have never been easy to lead because each is called on to be a leader. What Korach forgot is that to be a leader it is also necessary to be a follower. Leadership presupposes discipleship. That is what Joshua knew, and what led to him being chosen as Moses’ successor.

The tradition is summed up in the famous Maimonidean ruling: With three crowns was Israel crowned – with the crown of Torah, the crown of Priesthood, and the crown of Kingship. The crown of Priesthood was bestowed on Aaron and his descendants. The crown of Kingship was conferred on David and his successors. But the crown of Torah is for

¹ Numbers Rabbah 21:14.

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NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL
AND THE WEB AT WWW.AISHDAS.ORG/TA.
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all Israel. Whoever wishes, let them come and take it. Do not suppose that the other two crowns are greater than that of Torah.... The crown of Torah is greater than the other two crowns.²

This had immense social and political consequences. Throughout most of the biblical era, all three crowns were in operation. In addition to Prophets, Israel had Kings and an active Priesthood serving in the Temple. The dynastic principle – leadership passing from father to son – still dominated two of the three roles. But with the destruction of the Second Temple, Kingship and a functioning Priesthood ceased. Leadership passed to the Sages who saw themselves as heirs to the Prophets. We see this in the famous one-sentence summary of Jewish history with which Tractate Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) begins: “Moses received the Torah from Sinai and handed it on to Joshua, who handed it on to the elders, the elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets to the men of the Great Assembly” (Mishnah Avot 1:1).

The Rabbis see themselves as heirs to the Prophets rather than to the Priests. In biblical Israel, the Priests were the primary guardians and teachers of Torah. Why did the Rabbis not see themselves as heirs to Aaron and the Priesthood? The answer may be this: Priesthood was a dynasty. Prophetic leadership, by contrast, could never be predicted in advance. The proof was Moses. The very fact that his children did not succeed him as leaders of the people may have been an acute distress to him but it was a deep consolation to everyone else. It meant that anyone, by discipleship and dedication, could aspire to Rabbinic leadership and the crown of Torah.

Hence we find in the sources a paradox. On the one hand, the Torah describes itself as an inheritance: “Moses commanded us the Torah as an inheritance [morasha] of the congregation of Jacob” (Deut. 33:4). On the other hand, the Sages were insistent that Torah is not an inheritance: “R. Yose said: Prepare yourself to learn Torah, for it is not given to you as an inheritance [yerusha]” (Mishnah Avot 2:12).

The simplest resolution of the contradiction is that there are two kinds of inheritance. Biblical Hebrew

contains two different words for what we receive as a legacy: yerusha/morasha and nachala. Nachala is related to the word nachal, “a river.” It signifies something passed down automatically across the generations, as river water flows downstream, easily and naturally. Yerusha comes from the root yarash, meaning “to take possession.” It refers to something to which you have legitimate title, but which you need positive action to acquire.

A hereditary title, such as being a duke or an earl, is passed from father to son. So too is a family business. The difference is that the first needs no effort on the part of the heir, but the second requires hard work if the business is to continue to be worth something. Torah is like a business, not a title. It must be earned if it is to be sustained.

The Sages themselves put it more beautifully: “Moses commanded us the Torah as an inheritance [morasha] of the congregation of Jacob’ – read not ‘inheritance [morasha]’ but ‘betrothed [me’orasa]” (Berachot 57a). By a simple change in pronunciation – turning a shin [=“sh”] into a sin [=“s”], “inheritance” into “betrothal” – the Rabbis signalled that, yes, there is an inheritance relationship between Torah and the Jew, but the former has to be loved if it is to be earned. You have to love Torah if you are to inherit it.

The Sages were fully aware of the social implications of R. Yose’s dictum that the Torah “is not given to you as an inheritance.” It meant that literacy and learning must never become the preserve of an elite: And why is it not usual for scholars to give birth to sons who are scholars? Yosef said: So that it should not be said that the Torah is their inheritance. (Nedarim 81a)

The Sages were constantly on their guard against exclusivist attitudes to Torah. Equality is never preserved without vigilance – and indeed there were contrary tendencies. We see this in one of the debates between the schools of Hillel and Shammai: “Raise up many disciples” – The school of Shammai says: A person is to teach only one who is wise, humble, of good stock, and rich.

But the school of Hillel says: Everyone is to be taught. For there were many transgressors in Israel who were attracted to the study of Torah, and from them sprang righteous, pious, and worthy men. To what may it be compared? “To a woman who sets a hen to brood on eggs – out of many eggs, she may hatch only a few, but out of a few [eggs], she hatches none at all.”³

One cannot predict who will achieve greatness. Therefore Torah must be taught to all. A later episode illustrates the virtue of teaching everyone: Once Rav came to a certain place where, though he had decreed a fast [for rain], no rain fell. Eventually someone else stepped forward in front of Rav before the Ark and prayed, “Who causes the wind to blow” – and the wind

² Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Talmud Torah 3:1.

³ Avot DeRabbi Natan, version 2, ch. 4.

blew. Then he prayed, "Who causes the rain to fall" – and the rain fell.

Rav asked him: What is your occupation [i.e., what is your special virtue that causes God to answer your prayers]? He replied: I am a teacher of young children. I teach Torah to the children of the poor as well as to the children of the rich. From those who cannot afford it, I take no payment. Besides, I have a fish pond, and I offer fish to any boy who refuses to study, so that he comes to study. (Ta'anit 24a)

It would be wrong to suppose that these attitudes prevailed in all places at all times. No nation achieves perfection. An aptitude for learning is not equally distributed within any group. There is always a tendency for the most intelligent and scholarly to see themselves as more gifted than others and for the rich to attempt to purchase a better education for their children than the poor. Yet to an impressive – even remarkable – degree, Jews were vigilant in ensuring that no one was excluded from education and that schools and teachers were paid for by public funds. By many centuries, indeed millennia, Jews were the first to democratise education. The crown of Torah was indeed open to all.

Moses' tragedy was Israel's consolation. "The Torah is their inheritance." The fact that his successor was not his son, but Joshua, his disciple, meant that one form of leadership – historically and spiritually the most important of the three crowns – could be aspired to by everyone. Dignity is not a privilege of birth. Honour is not confined to those with the right parents. In the world defined and created by Torah, everyone is a potential leader. We can all earn the right to wear the crown. *Covenant and Conversation 5779 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2019 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

The daughters of Tzelofhad speak right. You shall surely give them a hereditary portion of land alongside that of their father's brethren." (Numbers 27:7) One of the most fascinating aspects of the entire Torah is the portion which deals with the case of the daughters of Tzelofhad, an incident considered of such significance that it is repeated at the conclusion of the book of Numbers as well (Numbers 36). How much faith we learn from these resourceful and irrepressible women!

But a most interesting secondary question may be pondered from the midrashic study of the incident of these five women: is it indeed permissible for men to learn Torah from women in the first place? In this particular instance the Talmud (Bava Batra 119) pictures Moses giving a class on the levirate marriage, with the five Tzelofhad sisters in attendance. They raise

a question before Moses: Is a daughter considered significant issue, to be respected as progeny and heir to her father's estate, or not? If not, then you must allow our widowed mother to marry her deceased husband's brother and be supported by him as the respected wife of a levirate marriage, just as though she hadn't had issue or progeny at all. But if we daughters are considered progeny enough to exclude our mother from a levirate marriage, then you must allow us to inherit our father! And God decides in favor of the argument of these women. Hence it would seem that we certainly can learn Torah from women!

The Bible refers to two fundamental Jewish ideals, Torah and the Land of Israel, as *morasha*, a heritage, rather than *yerusha*, an inheritance (see Exodus 6:8 and Deut. 33:4). From a literal perspective, the unique word "heritage" (*morasha*) connotes more than the usual "inheritance"; it has the additional directive that it must be handed over from generation to generation. An inheritance can be cash money, and may be squandered away; a heritage is an heirloom, like candlesticks or a Kiddush goblet, and is meant to be passed down to one's children. And Torah study applies to women as well as to men: "And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain saying, 'Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob [Rashi: this refers to the women] and shall you declare to the children of Israel [Rashi: the males]'" (Exodus 19:3). Therefore, the commandment of *hak'hel*, to gather the Israelites once every seven years and establish a reaffirmation of the covenant via a public study of Torah, includes the women as well as the men (Deut. 31:12). And if women must learn and accept Torah (at least the portions of Torah necessary to properly observe the commandment of God), then they must likewise be responsible to pass Torah down to the next generation – parent to child, teacher to student.

It is for this reason that Deborah is praised as one of the first judges in Israel (Judges 4:4–5), that Bruriah disagreed halakhically with her father Rabbi Hanina b. Teradion and her view is recorded (Tosefta Kelim 4), and that the Sefer HaHinukh rules (Negative Commandment 152) that a learned woman fit to render religio-legal decisions may do so. (Similarly rule the Hida, Barki Yosef Hoshen Mishpat 7:12, and the Rishon LeTzion HaRav Bakshi Doron, Binyan Av Siman 65.) To cite only one anecdotal example amongst many, when a difficult *eiruv* question came up before a number of scholars, the grandmother of Rav Shneur Zalman of Liadi adjudicated the matter, and everyone acquiesced to her decision (Sefer HaZikhronot, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson, Part 2).

The practical Torah that we learn from the daughters of Tzelofhad is that women do not only have a portion of Torah, but that they also have a portion in the Holy Land of Israel. Their particular case, which

was ultimately adjudicated by the Almighty Himself because Moses did not have the answer, was that they were correct in insisting that since their father had no sons, they – the five women – were to receive their rightful portions in the Land of Israel (Numbers 27:7). As a direct result of their vindication, the Almighty conveyed all of the laws of inheritance to Moses and Israel (Numbers 27:8–11). Indeed, women's inheritance rights developed from this case to such an extent that if a father bequeaths only a small amount of property, the daughters' sustenance and dowries must be provided for – even if nothing will be left over for the sons (Ketubot 108b).

But what we really learn from the daughters of Tzelofhad is the true love of the Land of Israel, as we have seen in our previous Torah commentary. It is on this basis that Rabbi Ephraim of Lunschitz, known as the Kli Yakar, gives the following "feminist" spin to his interpretation of the first verse of the sin of the scouts: "And the Lord spoke to Moses saying, 'Send forth your men that they may scout out the land'" (Numbers 13:2). Writes the Kli Yakar: "Since our Sages teach that it was [only] men who hated the Land [of Israel] and said 'let us return to Egypt,' whereas the women loved the land, as they [the daughters of Tzelofhad] said 'Give us an inheritance,' the Holy One blessed be He, who knows the future, said it would be better to send women, but [unfortunately], you [Moses] trust [your] men." God understood, however, that only tragedy would result from a reconnaissance mission consisting only of men!

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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Judaism constantly stresses the importance and worth of the individual. Even though there are billions of people living on our planet, the worth of the individual should not be diminished by this fact. In the Torah reading of this week the Lord informs Moshe that it was the action of one individual – Pinchas – that saved hundreds of thousands, if not millions of Jews from destruction. The bold and audacious act of one individual had the power and ability to turn away, so to speak, the wrath of God from the Jewish people at a moment of crisis.

Positive acts of individuals that are bold and different do not usually result in public approval. In fact, many times that individual is roundly criticized by the general public and his behavior is seen to be incorrect, if not even immoral. Yet, after time passes and the situation can be studied and analyzed in the light of later events and circumstances, it may become apparent that the criticized action of the individual was not only correct but was and is of immense value to society.

As an example, from recent history, Menacem Begin was pilloried and criticized for having prevented

Saddam Hussein from acquiring nuclear weapons. All the do-gooders of the world and the United Nations clucked in disapproval and threatened action against Israel for this aggressive act. A decade later the world begrudgingly acknowledged that this act of seeming aggression was really one of human salvation and enormous merit. The greatness of individuals lies in the fact that some of them are willing to swim upstream and do what is right even if it is unpopular and dangerous.

One of the rites of passage into male adult Jewish life is the institution of Bar Mitzvah. In a very clear way this ancient Jewish celebration reinforces the idea of the worth of each individual Jew. When we add another individual to the Jewish nation, it is not just a matter of population and numbers. It is rather the addition of a special personality with talents that are unique to him, to a community that can and will benefit from those abilities.

In our synagogue this week a wonderful young man, Eliya Goldvicht will be called to the Torah on the day of his Bar Mitzvah. Having grown up in our synagogue for the past four years he is known and beloved to all of us because of his wonderful talents, great smile and exemplary conduct. He is an individual who will undoubtedly make a mark on the Jewish community in future years.

Simply by knowing and appreciating him, as the synagogue membership has done over these past few years, the synagogue has reaffirmed this fundamental idea of the importance, uniqueness and greatness of the individual. All Jewish history, in fact all human history, is really the story of individuals and of their great accomplishments and even some of their disappointing failures. Eliya will be a great person that we will all be proud of and be able to say to later generations that we knew him when he became Bar Mitzvah. ©2019 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

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 AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

One way that people attempt to attain transcendence is by guiding their children on the path they began. Even Moshe (Moses), who was first and foremost committed to the nation of Israel and was the most humble of men, was hopeful that his own children would complete the mission he started and lead the people into Israel.

Hence, the Midrash notes, (See Rashi 27:16) it was after God permitted the daughters of Zelofhad to inherit from their father, (27:1-11) that Moshe makes the request of God that a successor be appointed in the hope that his sons would be tapped for leadership.

It was not to be. The Talmud points out that Torah leadership is not automatically inherited. (Nedarim 71a) This principle is seen as God tells Moshe that none of his children will lead the people, rather Yehoshua (Joshua) will be the next leader of the nation. (Numbers 27:18) Moshe transfers the reigns to Yehoshua. Several lessons can be learned from the way Moshe passes on his position.

First: Although it was not to be transmitted to his sons as he had wished, Moshe transfers the power to Yehoshua with great support and kindness. Whereas God told Moshe to "lay your hand (in the singular) on him [Yehoshua]," (27:18) Moshe places both hands on him. (27:23) Rashi makes this point by maintaining that Moshe laid his hands on Yehoshua "generously, in much greater measure than he was commanded."

Second: Whereas God tells Moshe to "put some of his honor upon him [Yehoshua]," (Numbers 27:20) there is no mention that Moshe does so. Perhaps Moshe's humble side felt that he was unworthy to act in such a way--only God can give such honor. Alternatively, Moshe wanted Yehoshua to do it his way. While Moshe had given Yehoshua a sound foundation, Moshe understood that every leader is blessed with a unique style. Yehoshua should not become Moshe's clone—he should develop his own way, his own honor.

Third: Moshe genuinely desires that Yehoshua receive a better lot than he did. Hence, Moshe tells God that the new leader be able "to lead them out, and...bring them in." (Numbers 27:17) This, according to the Midrash, means that Moshe hoped that unlike himself, the next leader would not only be permitted to begin his task by moving the Jews out, but also be allowed to conclude his mission by taking the people into the land of Israel. (Bamidbar Rabbah 21:16) Even Moshe could not do it all. Yehoshua would complete that which Moshe started, that which even Moshe could not complete.

It's not easy to step back and make space for someone else. This is especially the case vis-à-vis our children. When someone else is given precedence over one's own child it presents an especially challenging situation, especially when one is in a position of power and is as Moshe was, the prophet of prophets.

But Moshe did all of this, and did so nobly. The most humble person ever to live was without envy and graciously transferred power to the other. In doing so he once again showed his great strength and unbridled selflessness. ©2019 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 LEVINE

The Non-Kohein Kohein

The story of Pinchas ben Elazar is unique in many ways. The story takes place in one parasha and concludes in the next parasha. This is so unusual that the non-Jewish Bible lists both aspects of the story within the same chapter. We are told very little at this stage about Pinchas other than that he was counted earlier by name in the Torah. We also know that he was not one of the Kohanim who was anointed when Moshe anointed the Kohanim because the only ones who were anointed were Aharon and his four sons. Our Rabbis tell us that Pinchas was the only one of the third generation of Kohanim who was already alive at this time. We also know that at the beginning of this parasha his name is written with a yud z'irah, a small yud. All of these different factors lead us to understand that Pinchas is at least unusual if nothing more.

Balak, the King of Moav, tried to curse the Jewish people through Bilaam, but was unsuccessful.

Bilaam did, however, tell Balak that he could destroy the people by enticing them with his women. "And (these women) called to the people to bring sacrifices to their gods and the people ate and they bowed down to their gods. And Yisrael became attached to Ba'al P'or and Hashem's wrath flared up against Yisrael. And Hashem said to Moshe take all of the (ring)leaders of the people and hang them before Hashem opposite the sun and the flaring wrath of Hashem will withdraw from Yisrael. And Moshe said to the judges of Yisrael, each man shall kill his men that were attached to Ba'al P'or. And behold a man from the Children of Yisrael came and he brought near to his brothers a Midianite woman before the eyes of Moshe and all of the entire assembly of the Children of Yisrael and they were weeping at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. And Pinchas the son of Elazar the son of Aharon the Kohein saw and he stood up from the assembly and he took a spear in his hand. And he came after the Yisraelite man into the tent and he pierced them both, the Yisraelite man and the woman into her stomach, and the plague was halted from upon the Children of Yisrael. And those who died of the plague were twenty-four thousand."

Here we see that Pinchas, in his zeal, took a spear and killed the Yisraelite man and the Midianite woman. In defiance of Moshe, this man had taken a Midianite woman into the camp and the Midrash says that he brought her to the Ohel Mo'eid in order to have relations with her there in defiance of Hashem. It was only Pinchas' decisive action which was able to assuage the anger of Hashem. Many of the B'nei Yisrael complained that Pinchas acted incorrectly and killed a man without a warning and a trial. HaRav Matis Weinberg quotes a Midrash which says that Moshe Rabbeinu also questioned the correctness of Pinchas' actions. Moshe complained to Pinchas that having relations with a non-Jewish woman is not punishable by death. Pinchas remind Moshe that Moshe had taught the law that a zealot can put someone to death if he witnesses the sin. This is what Moshe had taught them at the Golden Calf when he told them that they could kill those sinners without trial.

In Parashat Pinchas the Torah continues: "And Hashem spoke to Moshe saying. Pinchas the son of Elazar the son of Aharon the Kohein turned back My wrath from upon the B'nei Yisrael when he zealously avenged My vengeance among them so that I did not consume the B'nei Yisrael in My vengeance. Therefore, say behold I have given him My covenant of peace. And it will be for him and his children after him a covenant of eternal priesthood because he took vengeance for his Elokim and he atoned for the B'nei Yisrael."

Pinchas is told that he and his children will now enter the world of the Kohanim. Is it possible that Pinchas is not already a Kohein? The K'li Yakar

explains that Pinchas was not directly accepted into the K'hunah for several reasons: Elazar married a daughter of Puti'eil, a descendent of Yitro who fattened calves for the purpose of serving other gods. Pinchas was concerned that the troublemakers of his generation would say that his father had no right to marry a daughter of Yitro who had served idols. Pinchas was also worried that people would say, "how can a descendent of an idol worshipper be zealous against a leader of Yisrael." He was left in a state of limbo, he was an unanointed Kohein and he was not a descendent of an already anointed father. Pinchas, therefore, did not become a Kohein until Hashem bestowed that reward on him and his children at this time.

Pinchas also receives a special covenant of peace. Just as the name Pinchas is written with a yud z'ira, a small yud, the word shalom here is written with a vav k'tiah, a broken vav. There are many different explanations for this altering of the letter. The Abravanel suggests that this was peace from the relatives of Zimri who might wish to exact revenge for his death. HaRav Zvi Yehudah Berlin ties this reward to Pinchas' act of zealous vengeance. The peace which Pinchas receives is the peace of inner wholeness. Pinchas himself must have suffered tremendously from his actions. "Killing a human being without due process of law is liable to cause ...inner demoralization." Pinchas was torn by feelings that he acted too brashly. The Netziv explained that Pinchas was rewarded that he should not be quick-tempered or angry. "Since it was only natural that such a deed as Pinchas' should leave in his heart an emotional unrest afterward, the Divine blessing was designed to cope with this situation and promised peace and tranquility of soul." HaRav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains that the small yud is a sign that perhaps his name was originally spelled without it but it was added to his name at this time. Here the yud indicated to all that Hashem understood Pinchas' zeal and he was correct.

It would be wrong of us to act as zealots today because we can not be certain of our motives. Pinchas was careful that his actions solely reflected the will of Hashem. He served Hashem completely and could not allow the desecration of Hashem's dwelling place by such licentious behavior. May we also be devoted to Hashem and protect the very nature of His holiness and purity against those who would desecrate it. ©2019 Rabbi D. Levine



RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"Pinchas the son of Elazar the son of Aharon the Kohain turned back My anger from upon the Children of Israel" (Bamidbar 25:11). Rashi, based on the Talmud (Sanhedrin 82b), explains why Pinachas' "yichus" (lineage) was mentioned here;

“because the Tribes were belittling him, [saying] ‘have you seen this son of the fattener, whose mother’s father fattened calves to be offered to other deities, and [despite this] he killed a tribal chief of Israel?’ Therefore, the verse traces his lineage after Aharon.” [From the context of the Talmud, it is apparent that being Aharon’s grandson was significant not only because of who Aharon was, but because of what Aharon himself did (stopping the plague after Korach’s rebellion, just as Pinachas stopped the plague here) and what Tribe he was from (Levi, who defended Dinah’s honor, and the Tribe that took a stand by the golden calf), making Pinachas’ actions consistent with, and a continuation of, the actions of his ancestors on his father’s side.] Nevertheless, it is puzzling that the nation should ridicule Pinachas at all, since he did stop the plague from spreading any farther, and it was quite apparent that what was going on (including, and especially, what Zimri, the Tribal Chief who Pinachas killed, had done) was inappropriate. Why was Pinachas being belittled for what he did?

Shortly before this part of the Talmud’s elucidation of what happened, we are told that Pinachas challenged G-d for having killed 24,000 in the plague (before it was stopped by Pinachas’ actions). He stuck the bodies of the perpetrators he had killed before G-d and said to Him, “Master of the World, because of these (referring to Zimri and Cuzbi) 24,000 should fall?” Maharsha (on 44a, where this part of the story is quoted) asks why Pinachas attributed the deaths of these 24,000 to Zimri’s sin if the nation had started sinning well before this (see 25:1)? As a matter of fact (Maharsha doesn’t refer to this in his question), the Talmud itself (on 82a), describing how things developed, tells us that Zimri only became involved, and got together with Cuzbi, because the people of his Tribe (Shimon) demanded that he do something about their facing the death penalty if successfully prosecuted. Why did Pinachas blame the death of the 24,000 who died in the plague on Zimri if their sins had been committed prior to his actions?

Maharsha answers his question by saying that we know the 24,000 died because of Zimri, and not due to the sins committed prior, because the plague, and it being stopped, isn’t mentioned until after Pinachas killed Zimri. However, even if this is how we know Zimri was the cause, it doesn’t explain how or why he was the cause. Nor does it explain how Pinachas knew Zimri was the cause, and not the previous sins.

Nevertheless, from the fact that those who had sinned were going to be prosecuted in a court of law, and from the way the Talmud explains how things unfolded, it is apparent not only that Zimri caused the plague that killed 24,000, but how and why he was the cause. First of all, the sinners themselves (or the leaders who didn’t do enough to prevent the sinning, see <http://tinyurl.com/gplkj77>) were being taken to court

to be prosecuted for their sins, so a plague was, at that point, unnecessary. Only when it developed into something beyond individual sinners being punished, becoming a national issue because of Zimri’s public display, that prosecuting individual sinners wasn’t sufficient, making the plague necessary. This aspect alone is enough to pin the blame for the plague on Zimri, and explain how Pinachas knew it was his fault. But the Talmud’s narrative adds even more.

After his Tribe approached him, Zimri “gathered 24,000 from Israel” (notice how these are “from Israel,” and not just “from his Tribe”) and then (with these 24,000) approached Cuzbi. When the Talmud recounts the miracles done on Pinachas’ behalf, the last one mentioned was “the angel coming and causing destruction in the nation,” referring to those who were with Zimri and would have attacked Pinachas for killing him if not for the angel’s intervention. Although Rashi (on the Talmud) says it was “those of his Tribe” that the angel destroyed, it can certainly be suggested (and fits the context of the Talmud’s narrative) that the same 24,000 who had accompanied Zimri to recruit Cuzbi were still with Zimri when Pinachas killed him, and were the ones who would have killed Pinachas had the angel not destroyed them first. [The parallel narrative in the Sifre (at the end of Parashas Balak) says explicitly that Pinachas challenged G-d regarding the deaths caused by the angel who protected him.] The verse (and the Talmud) would therefore be referring to these 24,000 as the ones who were killed in the plague, and Pinachas would also be referring to them when he challenged G-d by asking whether 24,000 should have died because of Zimri.

[It should be noted that although this approach works even if this is the only plague that occurred here, the narrative in Sh’mos Rabbah (33:5, see also Iyun Yaakov) has two plagues, one that started shortly before Pinachas decided to kill Zimri and Cuzbi, and one that started afterwards, to protect him from Zimri’s followers (who, in this narrative, were his tribesmen), and says it was this second plague that Pinachas challenged G-d about.]

We have placed the blame for the deaths of the 24,000 who were gathered by Zimri squarely on Zimri (as did Pinachas, asking G-d why they had to die because of his wickedness). Nevertheless, the circumstances that led to their deaths was the plague inflicted by the angel to protect Pinachas. So even though the blame falls on Zimri, from the perspective of those who saw 24,000 of their brothers perish when they tried to attack Pinachas, they blamed Pinachas, and therefore began to belittle him. In order to set the record straight, though, G-d testified that “Pinachas the son of Elazar the son of Aharon the Kohain turned back my anger from the Children of Israel,” and because he killed Zimri and Cuzbi, “I did not wipe out the Children of Israel.” Without Pinachas stepping up, the first

plague, which started before Pinachas killed Zimri, would have wiped them all out, or, if there was only one plague, it would have started anyway and wiped everybody out. G-d is telling them not to blame Pinachas for the death of those 24,000, as without him they would have died anyway, and he saved many lives, as opposed to causing any to be lost. ©2016 Rabbi D. Kramer

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, the 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 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. ©2014 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

