

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS Z"L

Covenant & Conversation

Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Office of Rabbi Sacks will continue to distribute these weekly essays, so that people all around the world can keep on learning and finding inspiration in his Torah.

The parsha of Pinchas contains a masterclass on leadership, as Moses confronts his own mortality and asks God to appoint a successor. The great leaders care about succession. In parshat Chayei Sarah we saw Abraham instruct his servant to find a wife for his son Isaac, so that the family of the covenant will continue. King David chose Solomon. Elijah, at God's bidding, appointed Elisha to carry on his work.

In the case of Moses, the Sages sensed a certain sadness at his realisation that he would not be succeeded by either of his sons, Gershom or Eliezer. (That is the implication of the statement that "Moses long to die as did Aaron," Sifrei, Pinchas, 136, s.v. vayomer.)

Such is the case with Keter Torah, the invisible crown of Torah worn by the Prophets and the Sages. Unlike the crowns of priesthood and kingship, it does not pass dynastically from father to son. Charisma rarely does. What is instructive, though, is the language Moses uses in framing his request:

"May the Lord, God of the spirits of all flesh, choose a person over the congregation who will go out before them and come in before them, who will lead them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of the Lord will not be like sheep without a shepherd." (Num. 27:16)

There are three basic leadership lessons to be learned from this choice of words. The first, noted by Rashi (Num. 27:16, based on Tanchuma, Pinchas, 11), is implicit in the unusually long description of God as "the Lord, God of the spirits of all flesh." This means, Rashi explains, "Master of the universe, the character of each person is revealed to You, and no two are alike. Appoint over them a leader who will bear with each person according to their individual character."

The Rambam says that this is a basic feature of the human condition. Homo sapiens is the most diverse of all life forms. Therefore co-operation is essential -- because we are each different, others are strong where

we are weak and vice versa -- but cohesion is also difficult, because we each respond to challenges in different ways. That is what makes leadership necessary, but also demanding: "This great variety, and the necessity of social life, are essential elements in human nature. But the well-being of society demands that there should be a leader able to regulate the actions of each person; they must complete every shortcoming, remove every excess, and prescribe for the conduct of all, so that the natural variety should be counterbalanced by the uniformity of legislation, and the order of society be well established." (Guide for the Perplexed, book 2 chapter 40)

Leaders respect differences but, like the conductor of an orchestra, integrate them, ensuring that the many different instruments play their part in harmony with the rest. True leaders do not seek to impose uniformity. They honour diversity.

The second hint is contained in the word ish, "a person" over the congregation, to which God responds, "Take for yourself Joshua, a person [ish] of spirit (v. 18). The word ish here indicates something other than gender. This can be seen in the two places where the Torah uses the phrase ha-ish Moshe, "the man Moses":

One is in Exodus: "The man Moses was highly respected [gadol me'od, literally 'very great'] in the land of Egypt, in the eyes of Pharaoh's servants and the people." (Ex. 11:3)

The second is in Numbers: "Now the man Moses was very humble [anav me'od], more so than anyone else on the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3)

Note the two characteristics, seemingly opposed -- great and humble -- both of which Moses had in high degree (me'od, "very"). This is the combination of attributes Rabbi Yochanan attributed to God himself: "Wherever you find God's greatness, there you find His humility." (From the liturgy on Saturday night. The source is Pesikta Zutreta, Eikev.)

Here is one of his proof-texts: "For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the orphan and the widow, and loves the stranger residing among you, giving them food and clothing" (Deut. 10:17-18).

An ish in the context of leadership is not a male but rather, someone who is a mensch, a person whose greatness is lightly worn, who cares about the people

others often ignore, "the orphan, the widow and the stranger," who spends as much time with the people at the margins of society as with the elites, who is courteous to everyone equally and who receives respect because they give respect.

The real puzzlement, however, lies in the third clause: "Choose a person over the congregation who will go out before them and come in before them, who will lead them out and bring them in." This sounds like saying the same thing twice, which the Torah tends not to do. What does it mean?

The Torah is hinting here at one of the most challenging aspects of leadership, namely timing and pace. The first phrase is simple: "who will go out before them and come in before them." This means that a leader must lead from the front. They cannot be like the apocryphal remark of one British politician: "Of course I follow the party. After all, I am their leader." (This statement has been attributed to Benjamin Disraeli, Stanley Baldwin and Alexandre Auguste Ledru-Rollin.)

It is the second phrase that is vital: "who will lead them out and bring them in." This means: a leader must lead from the front, but he or she must not be so far out in front that when they turn around, they find that no one is following. Pace is of the essence. Sometimes a leader can go too fast. That is when tragedies occur.

To take two very different examples: when Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister she knew she was going to have to confront the miners' union in a long and bitter struggle. In 1981 they went on strike for a pay rise. Mrs Thatcher immediately made enquiries about the size of coal stocks. She wanted to know how long the country could survive without new supplies of coal. As soon as she discovered that stocks were low, she in effect conceded victory to the miners. She then, very quietly, arranged for coal to be stockpiled. The result was that when the miners went on strike again in 1983, she resisted their demands. There was a prolonged strike, and this time it was the miners who conceded defeat. A battle she could not win in 1981 she was able to win in 1983.

The very different example was that of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. The peace process he engaged with the Palestinians between 1993 and 1995 was deeply controversial, within Israel and beyond. There was some support but also much opposition. The tension mounted in 1995. In September of that year, I wrote an article in the press giving him my own personal support. At the same time, however, I wrote to him privately saying that I was deeply worried about internal opposition to the plan, and urging him to spend as much time negotiating with his fellow Israeli citizens -- specifically the religious Zionists -- as with the Palestinians. I did not receive a reply.

On Motsei Shabbat, 4 November 1995, we heard the news that Prime Minister Rabin had been assassinated at a peace rally by a young religious

Zionist. I attended the funeral in Jerusalem. Returning the next day, I went straight from the airport to the Israeli ambassador to sit with him and talk to him about the funeral, which he had not been able to attend, having had to stay in London to deal with the media.

As I entered his office, he handed me an envelope, saying, "This has just arrived for you in the diplomatic bag." It was Yitzhak Rabin's reply to my letter -- one of the last letters he ever wrote. It was a moving re-affirmation of his faith, but tragically by the time it was delivered he was no longer alive. He had pursued peace, as we are commanded to do, but he had gone too fast for those who were not yet prepared to listen.

Moses knew this himself from the episode of the spies. As Maimonides says in *The Guide* (Book 3, chapter 32), the task of fighting battles and conquering the land was just too much for a generation born into slavery. It could only be done by their children, those born in freedom. Sometimes a journey that seems small on the map takes forty years.

Respect for diversity, care for the lowly and powerless as well as the powerful and great, and a willingness to go no faster than people can bear -- these are three essential attributes of a leader, as Moses knew from experience, and as Joshua learned through long apprenticeship to the great man himself. *Covenant and Conversation 5781 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2021 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd the Lord said to Moses, 'Take for yourself Joshua the son of Nun, an individual who has spirit within him, and lay (or lean) your hand upon him. Stand him up before Elazar the Priest and before the entire congregation, and command him before their eyes. And give of your glory upon him in order that the entire congregation of the children of Israel may obey him.'" [Num. 27:18-20]. In these three verses we see the "passing of the guard," the succession of leadership from Moses to Joshua. Embedded within the three different actions which God commanded Moses to perform, we may begin to define three necessary aspects of traditional Jewish leadership. Firstly, Moses was to "lay his hands" upon Joshua, an act which expressed a conferral of rabbinic authority, *semikha* (literally a laying upon or leaning upon), from master to disciple (cf. Mishnah Sanhedrin 1:1). Since Moses was traditionally known as *Moshe Rabbenu* (our religious teacher or rabbi) and since Joshua is biblically and midrashically pictured as Moses' devoted disciple, it is perfectly logical to assume that the first transference from Moses to Joshua was that of religio-legal authority, conveying the

law to the next generation and continuing the march of the Oral Law – Torah Se'b'al Peh – from generation to generation.

Moses is then commanded by God to “stand Joshua up” before Elazar the Priest. The Kohen Gadol or High Priest was certainly a leader in ancient Israel – but his Divine service was more spiritual than intellectual, more emotional than legal. His areas was the Sanctuary or Holy Temple. And as the Bible expresses it: “They shall make for Me a Sanctuary (a Holy Temple or Synagogue) so that I may dwell among (and within) them” (Exodus 25:8). The task of the High Priest and the Priest-teachers was to have the wherewithal to constantly bring the living word of God to the people and to inspire them with love of God and love of Torah (the Priestly Benediction). The Rav (Moshe Rabbenu) was expected to teach and interpret God’s word for every generation; the High Priest was expected to ritually perform and maintain the ritual experience from generation to generation, and to inspire every Jew to feel God’s loving presence within him/herself.

And finally, Moses was to “give of his glory (Hebrew *hod*) upon (Joshua) in order that the entire congregation of Israel may obey him,” as we find referring to King Solomon who was gifted with “the glory of majesty which was unique only to him (Chronicles 1,20,25). It was precisely this glorious majesty which Moses conferred upon Joshua, which can best be translated as charismatic influence. The great British Philosopher and Chief Rabbis, Jonathan Sacks of blessed memory, defines power as a function of strength to overcome one’s enemies whereas charismatic influence secures posterity and continuity. He evokes the Midrash (Bereshit Rabbah 21:15), which compares the giving over of power to “a pouring out from one vessel to another,” whereas the conferral of influence is likened to “the kindling of one candle from another candle.” When wine, for example, is poured from one goblet into another, the first goblet becomes emptied and devoid of its joy-giving liquid. Similarly, when a political leader leaves office and his successor takes over, no authority remains in the hand of the incumbent.

How different is charismatic influence? After the initial candle has kindled its flame onto another candle, the light of the first candle has in no way become diminished; much the opposite, now there are two candles shining brightly, providing double the amount of light in the room. My revered teacher, Rabbi Joseph B Soloveitchik, went even one step further when he interpreted the Biblical text of our weekly portion at the celebration of my class’s rabbinical ordination. The “laying of the hands” is usually interpreted as an inter-generational conferral of authority: the master from a former generation is “handing over” the authority of our ancient tradition (*trado* in Latin means to hand over) to

the younger generation.

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

This is why Moses had to put down Korah – who wanted to usurp power for a false end – but encouraged Eldad and Medad, who were influenced by a Divine spirit. And this is the true meaning of our Sages’ adage that a father is never jealous of a child nor is a teacher ever jealous of a disciple. Politics yield power, which disappears in the sand-dunes of times; learning and piety breed influence, which last for all eternity. The Israelite Kings are scarcely remembered while the Israelite prophets and sages are still being studied and interpreted today. Lust for power is ultimately consumed by fiery flames, while the influence of Torah education will enable the light of the menorah to emblazon the path to the tree of life in our return to Eden. ©2021 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

There were extremely negative murmurings within the people of Israel in objection to the actions of Pinchas for his zealousness in slaying Zimri together with the lecherous princess of Midian, Kozbi bat Tzur. Many attributed the violence of his act to the fact that his mother that his mother was a Midianite and that he was descended from a priest of Midian himself.

There are those amongst us who abhor violence at all costs, in all circumstances. There is no such thing as a justifiable homicide as far as they are concerned. Human life is so precious that even the most evil of people must be protective so that no harm should befall them. Apparently, these murmurings against Pinchas, the grandson of Aharon, who was the most beloved of all leaders of the Jewish people, were so strong that the Lord had to “intervene” to defend Pinchas and highlight the justification and necessity of his act.

In theory, pacifism is a noble idea. However, the contentious and dangerous world that human beings are forced to live in becomes a certain recipe for disaster, and the triumph of tyranny and evil. Justice is

a messy business to put into practice. The effect of the immorality of Zimri on the general Jewish society was so detrimental that the Lord indicates that a plague of enormous consequences would have been loosed on the Jewish people were it not for the actions of Pinchas.

One of the basic questions in ethical literature, and it appears as a basic question in Halacha, debates the morality of sacrificing one's life in order that many lives will be saved and spared. It is not my purpose in this article to develop this into a complex issue, but to point out that in this very instance, a moral dilemma of human beings was addressed by the statement of the Lord in defense of the actions of Pinchas.

Nevertheless, even with the apparent endorsement of Heaven for this act of zealotry, Judaism shies away from all forms of fanaticism. There is no other person in the holy writings of Scripture whose zealotry is condoned by Heaven. In fact, a great prophet Elijah is rebuked by Heaven itself for the zealotry that he displayed against the Jewish people. There is no question that the people were sinners and idolaters, and we can feel and empathize with the pain and loneliness of Elijah, seeing how disastrously Israel had wandered from their core beliefs and mission. Nevertheless, Elijah is instructed that until he removes that attitude of zealotry from his relationship with the people of Israel, he cannot remain the instrument of God's will to communicate with Israel.

At that moment in his life, Elijah is transformed from an avenging angel into the angel of generational covenant, the messenger of the tidings of redemption, and the comforting presence that has accompanied the Jewish people throughout the world over its long and painful journey of exile. So, we are brought full circle in dealing with vengeance and zealotry, and we are reminded not to be unrealistic pacifists at the same time. ©2021 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 Pinchas kills the Jewish man and Midianite woman committing immoral acts, God applauds Pinchas, granting him a "brit shalom" (covenant of peace; Numbers 25:12). Can we deduce from God's approval that zealotry – which often involves taking the law into one's own hands – is desirable?

Netziv sees the brit shalom as a corrective measure to zealotry. He notes that "the nature of [Pinchas's] act, killing with his own hand, tends to leave a harsh feeling in the heart. He who acted for the sake of heaven, was [therefore] granted a blessing to remain gentle and peaceful." Here, Netziv points out the need of an antidote for zealotry. The zealot should

scrupulously develop a counter-trait of shalom.

Another view can be suggested: rather than approving zealotry if balanced with shalom, the Pinchas story may teach the opposite. Zealotry is limited to the case of Pinchas, who received the brit shalom from God. In other cases, where God does not offer His explicit imprimatur, zealotry is prohibited.

Note that Pinchas is a descendant of Levi, who participated in the killing of all males in the city of Shechem (Genesis 34:25). Levi's father Jacob was incensed, and on his deathbed disavowed any connection to Levi's brutal act (Genesis 49:6).

Note also that Pinchas's descendant, the prophet Elijah, may have been removed from his position because of his zealousness. This occurs when Elijah declares in the haftarah for Parashat Pinchas, "Zealous have I been for the Lord...for the children of Israel have forsaken your covenant" (I Kings 19:10). God then indicates to Elijah that His spirit is not found in the wind, or in earthquake or fire. Rather, God's presence is best felt through "a still small voice" (I Kings 19:12). After Elijah persists in being zealous, God tells him that he will be replaced by his student Elisha (I Kings 19:16).

In fact, a reading of the Book of Joshua reveals that Pinchas himself changes his ways. Years after his zealous act, Pinchas brokers a truce between Israel and the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh (Joshua 22). Some commentaries suggest that only after Pinchas's intercession, which avoids a split within the Jewish People, is he completely embraced as a leader (Tosafot, Zevachim 101b, s.v. "hahu").

The pathway to redemption is not the way of Pinchas in Parashat Pinchas, but rather that of Pinchas in the Book of Joshua. This pathway to redemption will reach its crescendo when Elijah, the descendant of Pinchas, learns the lessons of the "still, small voice" returning parents to children and children to parents as he announces the coming of the Messiah (Malachi 3:23-24; Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer 47). ©2021 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 AVROHOM LEVENTHAL

My Meirke

There is a personal story told by the famed Jerusalem Maggid, Rav Shalom Schwadron, Z"L. While taking a stroll with his wife one Shabbat, he encountered a 5 year old boy running down the hill in Shaarei Chesed. The boy tripped on a rock and fell. As blood trickled from the gash on his forehead, Rav Shalom scooped him up and began running towards the neighborhood medic.

A neighbor, sitting on her porch, saw Rav Shalom running up the street with the young boy in his

arms. Thinking it to be his grandson, she called out, "Don't worry Reb Shalom, all will be fine. There is no need to run so fast and endanger yourself!"

As Rav Shalom came closer, the woman looked down only to realize that it was her grandson in Rav Shalom's arms.

"My Meirke, my Meirke!" she screamed. "Reb Shalom run faster. Get him to the doctor! Why are you moving so slowly? Oy vavoy!" Rav Shalom resisted the urge to tell her not to worry and that all would be fine...

Thank G-d the child was stitched up and in fact, all turned out well.

While the young boy grew up and forgot about that incident, Rav Shalom learned a story for life. "My Meirke" became one of his most famous discourses.

How many times are we only concerned about an issue when it's "Our Meirke". When someone else is going through a crisis we are quick to say that all will be well, G-d will help, etc. Only when we are affected do we expect others to take action.

Rav Shalom relayed that one must be as concerned for the welfare or plight of another even when there is no personal agenda.

This was the greatness of Pinchas. He took action for HaShem and in order to save the Jewish people.

Although not directly affected by HaShem's "anger" toward those sinning, Pinchas's true love of G-d and the Jewish people motivated him to take action. Drastic action that saved the people from destruction.

His zealousness was selfless, not self-serving. He was concerned for the honor of HaShem and equally for the welfare of the Jewish people.

His reward was quite fitting. Despite not being technically "eligible" prior to this, Pinchas was made a Kohen.

A Kohen is the ultimate servant of both G-d and the people. His work in the Beit HaMikdash bridges heaven and earth and HaShem to His nation.

How can we relate to the seemingly extreme actions of Pinchas?

We often witness behaviors in other people that might stir a righteous indignation. Some even become "zealous" for the honor of HaShem and His Torah.

How can one determine if his or her feelings and subsequent actions are coming from the right place?

The legacy of Pinchas and the "lesson" of Meirke can be the measuring stick.

When our "interest" or anger towards another arises, we must stop and ask ourselves, "Why am I upset by what that person is doing (or not doing)? Am I concerned for their well-being as well as being worried about the honor of heaven? Am I reacting from a place of love and responsibility or from judgement and self-righteousness? Am I being selfish or selfless?"

The answers to those questions require self-

knowledge and introspection.

True "zealots" must have as much love of their fellow person as they do for the honor of heaven. The pain and difficulty of their friend should be real to them as if their own.

Perhaps this is the reason that the Rabbis teach that beyond the Priesthood, Pinchas received an additional, eternal, distinction.

Pinchas is the soul of Eliyahu Hanavi (Elijah the Prophet), the one who will announce the arrival of the final redemption when all humankind are united both with G-d and with each other. ©2021 Rabbi A. Leventhal, noted educator and speaker, is the Executive Director at Lema'an Achai lemaanachai.org

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Eliyahu Will Answer All Our Questions

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

Some say that Pinchas is the same person as Eliyahu Ha-navi (the prophet Elijah). We await his coming, as promised by the prophet Malachi, with great anticipation. Eliyahu will provide answers to all our questions, clarifying laws as well as facts. Thus, the word "teiku," sometimes found in the Talmud following an unresolved question, is understood in folk etymology as an acronym for "Tishbi yetaretz kushiyot u'ba'ayot" ("Eliyahu will resolve all questions and difficulties").

Here is an example of a law to be clarified. When collecting a debt, do we leave the debtor the items which he needs to support himself? After all, when people donate to the *Beit HaMikdash*, we take their needs into account. Does this apply to debts owed to people as well?

The Talmud (*Bava Metzia* 114a) records that this question was once answered by Eliyahu based on a *gezeirah shavah*. (By the way, his view was not accepted by all. Even those who chose to accept his view were not doing so because he was a prophet. As we know, the Torah is not in heaven, nor is a prophet permitted to make new laws. Rather, Eliyahu was no less a Torah scholar than anyone else, and might have even been better than most.)

Here are some examples of facts with which Eliyahu will help us. He will clarify whether certain *terumah* has become impure, and the status of a piece of meat which was out of a Jew's sight. He will be able to adjudicate monetary disputes in which a rabbinic court could not reach a decision and the money was held in abeyance. These cases are all very specific.

Eliyahu will also clear up some general doubts found in rabbinic literature about how things work: Do people base a meal (*kovea seudah*) on wine in the same way that they do on bread? Would a dead person have allowed certain disrespect of his body on the part of his heirs? May we write *tefillin* on the skin of a kosher

fish, or is it considered disgusting? To resolve these doubts, we will rely on the prophetic power of Eliyahu, whose arrival we eagerly await. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

Take a census of [Jews] age twenty and up... able to go out to battle." (Bamidbar 26:2) The Meforshim offer several reasons why the Jews were counted now. In addition, this census would be used to identify the families who would inherit portions in the Land of Israel, and the other people would be included in that inheritance.

What's unusual, though, is that despite the Torah mentioning "those who go out to battle," the census included a number of people for whom this was inapplicable, and who would not inherit the land.

First of all, Dasan and Aviram were mentioned. They died in the rebellion of Korach and had no portion in the Land of Israel. The Torah seemingly veers from the topic of the census to recount the opening of the earth, and that Korach's sons did not die.

When counting the Tribe of Yehuda, Er and Onan, who died in Canaan, are mentioned. Why? They could not fight, and would not inherit the land. They weren't even there when the Jews left Egypt! Then, we find the daughters of Tzelophchad and Serach, daughter of Asher mentioned. Again, these women would not "go out to battle" so why are they mentioned in this census?

We'd like to suggest that the census of those "who go out to battle" and inherit the land, was intended to teach us something about the type of people who can do so. We know that when the Jews went out to war, the Kohain would offer opportunities for people to return home. One of those groups were those who were afraid, and Chazal tell us they were afraid of the sins they had committed. By mentioning these people, the Torah gives us insights into how we should behave in order to be worthy of going out to battle as a Jew.

Dasan and Aviram were quarrelmongers who loved fighting. We are supposed to be lovers of peace, and not seek ways of causing discord and derision. The son's of Korach, on the other hand, "rebelled" against rebellion, and were saved from the fate of their father. We, too, should carefully choose our paths and not do something just because others do it.

Er and Onan (whom the Ohr HaChaim says are symbolic of the first and second Bais HaMikdash) died for sins, Er from immorality and Onan, who copied that immorality due to a lack of concern for his brother. We must learn to be pure and care for our fellow Jews if we desire to be part of the Legions of Hashem and inherit Eretz Yisrael.

The daughters of Tzelophchad had such a love for the land that they stepped forward and made the

effort to request a portion. They were rewarded for this, and we, too, must constantly strive for spiritual heights. Finally, Serach brought good news to Yaakov (that Yosef was alive) in a way that was best for him. In order to be a soldier of Hashem, we should seek to make others happy and grateful to HaKadosh Baruch Hu.

We all go out to war in Hashem's army, and these "basics" are part of our training.

President William McKinley, our 25th president, had to decide between two qualified candidates for a key position. He struggled with the decision until he remembered an incident that had taken place years before. He was on a crowded streetcar and one of the candidates was also aboard, though he didn't see McKinley.

A tired old woman carrying a basket of laundry boarded and looked in vain for a seat. The candidate pretended not to see her, while McKinley rose and gave her his seat.

Remembering this incident, McKinley decided against that fellow, for what he called, "this little omission of kindness." Our decisions, even the small, passing ones, say a lot about us. ©2021 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

Daughters of Tzelaphchad

We find the story of the daughters of Tzelaphchad in our parasha this week. One could misunderstand this section of the Torah as a struggle for women's rights, but on closer examination that would prove baseless. The daughters make clear that their purpose was not to establish the rights of all women, but instead to avoid having their father's name lost among the inheritors of the land. This land would not be their possession but would pass to their husbands and their sons (not their daughters).

Our parasha begins by recalling the brave act of Pinchas when he killed Zimri and the Midianite woman Kozbi. There was a plague against the people who had been tempted by the Midianite women and worshipped Ba'al P'or, The Torah records the death of twenty-four thousand Jews in this plague. Hashem then had Moshe and Elazar count the B'nei Yisrael after the plague. This time, however, Hashem told Moshe and Elazar that these were the names of the families that would inherit the Land of Canaan, and that they should divide the land among these families by their tribe. Within this count, we were told that Tzelaphchad had only daughters, and the Torah proceeded to tell us their names. Had the daughters of Tzelaphchad been sons, they would each have been the head of a family. Yet it is clear that they did not ask for recognition as a separate family for inheritance purposes. Their wish instead was to be granted land only under Tzelaphchad's name to perpetuate the

name of their father.

When the daughter's approached Moshe, they did not appeal to him alone. "And they came near the daughters of Tzelaphchad the son of Cheifer the son of Gil'ad the son of Mechir the son of Menashe for the family of Menashe the son of Yosef and these are the names of his daughters Machla, Noa, and Chagla, and Milka and Tirtza.... And they stood before Moshe and before Elazar the Kohen and before the Leaders of the Tribes and before the entire congregation at the opening of the Tent of Meeting saying."

One should note the difference between their approach and the approach of those who were impure at the time of the Passover sacrifice. Both needed a Torah decision, but the impure individuals approached Aharon and Moshe whereas the daughters of Tzelaphchad approached Moshe, Elazar (after Aharon's death), the leaders of the Tribes, and the entire congregation. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin points out that the decision concerning those who were impure was a spiritual decision affecting a mitzvah which was between Man and Hashem. Those men sought an answer from the two spiritual leaders of the people. The B'not Tzelaphchad were seeking an answer based on a law which was between Man and his Fellowman. The inheritance of land, as requested by the daughters, affected the division of the Holy Land of Israel, and any share in that land had to fall under the watchful eyes of the leaders of each of the tribes and the entire people.

The B'not Tzelaphchad said, "Our father died in the wilderness and he was not among the congregation that was gathering against Hashem in the assembly of Korach, rather he died of his own sin and he had no sons." Why should the daughters have discussed Korach if it is true that Tzelaphchad had nothing to do with his rebellion? What was so different about Tzelaphchad's sin that he should not be disqualified from inheritance? And if the key to their request for an inheritance was that he had no sons, why was this not mentioned first and foremost? The Ramban suggests that the daughters were concerned that Moshe hated everyone involved in the rebellion of Korach. Rav Henech Leibowitz of the Chofetz Chaim Yeshivot explained that the daughters trusted Moshe, yet they were concerned that his subconscious impulse would be to lean the judgment against them if their father was part of the rebellion. Moshe was a humble man who would readily forgive any transgression against him. But Moshe was steadfast in his protection of Hashem's honor, and that might have driven Moshe to dismiss the B'not Tzelaphchad outright if their father had been part of this uprising.

Was Tzelaphchad's sin so different than the sin of Korach? Both chose to disregard the word of Hashem. Both are acts of rebellion against Hashem's Torah. How can the B'not Tzelaphchad ask Hashem

and his leaders to disregard their father's sin and not compare it to Korach's? The key word in the daughter's statement is b'chet'o, in his sin. Tzelaphchad was wrong in sinning before Hashem. The daughters do not dismiss his sin nor complain about his death. But they do ask that we look upon Korach's sin as significantly worse. Korach rebelled against Hashem, but he also encouraged others to follow his actions. Korach made everyone question Moshe's authority and Moshe's connection to Hashem. His actions not only called into question whether Moshe had appointed Aharon as Kohen Gadol in an act of nepotism, but also whether any of the laws were the authentic word of Hashem or, instead, part of Moshe's hubris. Whether Tzelaphchad was guilty of gathering kindling wood on the Sabbath, or whether he died for a different sin, his sin was individual and not done to encourage others to disregard the Torah. This fundamental difference between Korach and Tzelaphchad encouraged the daughters to view their father's death differently.

Though we try to understand every aspect of the Law, it is clear that we must learn to approach our Rabbis for understanding. One should never assume that one can answer every nuance of halacha. That is why there are so many volumes of sefarim devoted to sh'eilot u't'shuvot, questions and answers. Our Rabbis have learned to listen carefully to every word in a question and to respond to the exact need that is requested. There are some people who are afraid to approach a Rav with a "silly" question and end up losing by not getting the correct answer. Our Rabbis tell us, "a person who is embarrassed cannot learn." Had the B'not Tzelaphchad not made their request, we would have lost an important part of our law, and an answer that was not specified in the Torah. May we not be afraid to seek out a Rav, and may we never be too embarrassed to ask. It is only through this process that we can serve Hashem properly. © 2021 Rabbi D. Levin

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

R' Moshe Yehoshua Hager z"l (1916-2012; Vizhnitzer Rebbe) writes: With the month of Tammuz waning, the High Holidays are rapidly approaching. Indeed, "Tammuz" (Tav-Mem-Vav-Zayin) can be seen as an acronym of the Hebrew phrase, "Z'manei Teshuvah Me'mashmishin U'va'in" / "The times for repentance are coming closer and closer." Therefore, now is the time to examine one's actions, cease any bad deeds, and increase one's good deeds.

The Vizhnitzer Rebbe continues: This is alluded to in our Parashah, in the verse (28:3), "And you shall say to them, 'This is the fire-offering that you are to offer to Hashem--male lambs in their first year, unblemished, two a day, as a continual elevation offering.'" The Gematria of the Hebrew words

"Ve'amarta La'hem" / "And you shall say to them" equals the Gematria of "Atah" (Ayin-Tav-Heh) plus 248. Midrash Bereishit Rabbah says that the word "Atah" alludes to Teshuvah. [An explanation of this connection is beyond the scope of this space.] Thus, the verse is exhorting us to repent now in order to "repair" all 248 of our limbs. This Teshuvah should be done with Simchah / joy, out of both Yir'ah / fear or awe and Ahavah / love for Hashem. Indeed, the Hebrew word "Ha'isheh" (Heh-Aleph-Shin-Heh) / "the fire-offering" has the same Gematria as the initials of Simchah, Yir'ah, and Ahavah.

The Vizhnitzer Rebbe concludes: Know that repenting completely requires setting aside time to examine one's deeds. Otherwise, one cannot know for what to repent. Also, one must study works that teach Yir'ah in order to understand why one is in this world and to learn how to perfect his soul. (Yeshuot Moshe)



"Moshe did as Hashem had commanded him. He took Yehoshua and stood him before Elazar Ha'kohen and before the entire assembly. He leaned his hands upon him and commanded him, as Hashem had spoken through Moshe." (27:22-23) Midrash Yalkut Shimoni comments on the verse (Hoshea 11:1): "For Yisrael is a lad, and I loved him" -- Moshe said to Yehoshua: "This people that I am turning over to you are still kid goats. They are still infants, and you should not be too exacting with them, for even their Master is not exacting about their misdeeds. At the Yam Suf, they rebelled, and the angels said, 'They are rebelling, and You are silent?!' Hashem replied, 'They are but youth, and one cannot be too exacting with youth. Just as a baby is born dirty and is washed off, so it is with Yisrael.'" [Until here from the Midrash]

R' Yerachmiel Shulman z"l Hy"d (Menahel Ruchani of the Bet Yosef-Novardok Yeshiva in Pinsk, Poland; killed in the Holocaust) writes: Our Sages refer to the Generation of the Desert as the "Dor De'ah" / "Generation of Discernment." Nevertheless, Hashem judged them as if they were youth, whose ability to discern right from wrong is limited. In this vein, our Sages say, "A person cannot fully grasp what his teacher of Torah is imparting until 40 years have passed." Hashem tolerated Bnei Yisrael's misdeeds, because the Torah had not yet "settled in" and become a part of their reality; they were but "youth" when it came to living a Torah life in day-to-day practice.

R' Shulman continues: A parent's love for his child enables him to tolerate the hard work of raising that child. We read (Kohélet 3:11), "He has also put an Olam / enigma into their minds so that man cannot comprehend what Elokim has done from beginning to end." The word "Olam" can be read "Elem" / "youth." Hashem put the youth into their minds (and hearts) -- He caused parents to love their children so they will tolerate their mistakes.

This, concludes R' Shulman, is what Moshe told Yehoshua: Emulate Hashem's ways! When a wise person behaves in a way that is beneath him, think of him as a youth; then, you will be able to tolerate him and lead him gently. (Peninei Ha'shlaimut: Sha'ar Ha'savlanut 1:4)



"Therefore, say, 'Behold! I give him My covenant of peace.'" (25:12) Midrash Bemidbar Rabbah states: "Justice requires that Pinchas receive his reward." [Until here from the Midrash]

R' Shalom Mordechai Schwadron z"l (1835-1911; a leading Halachic authority in Galicia) writes: R' Yosef Albo z"l (Spain; 1380-1444) teaches that when Hashem judges man's sins, He judges based on man's level, as if to say, "What more could one expect from a lowly human?" In contrast, when He weighs man's good deeds, He does so from His own perspective, as if to say, "Look how man did the Will of the King of Kings!"

In light of this, writes R' Schwadron, we can understand the above Midrash as follows: "Justice requires that Pinchas receive his reward," i.e., Strict Justice would dictate that man be rewarded only on his own level. But, due to My Kindness, I reward man with eternal reward, a reward on My level. (Techelet Mordechai)

R' Eliezer Papo z"l (1785-1827; rabbi in Sarajevo, best known as author of Pele Yo'etz) explains the above Midrash as follows: We read (Devarim 6:25), "And it will be a Tzedakah for us if we are careful to perform this entire commandment before Hashem, our Elokim, as He commanded us." R' Moshe ben Nachman z"l (Ramban; 1194-1270; Spain and Eretz Yisrael) explains that all reward we receive for our Mitzvot is "Tzedakah" / "charity," for we are Hashem's servants and we are obligated to serve Him, whether or not He would reward us. However, writes R' Papo, that is true only when we are doing only what we are commanded, as the quoted verse says: "As He commanded us." When Pinchas risked his life to save Bnei Yisrael from annihilation, he went well beyond what he was commanded to do. Therefore, "Justice requires that Pinchas receive his reward." (Elef Ha'magen) © 2021 S. Katz & torah.org

