

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

**H**idden beneath the surface of parshat Pinchas the sages uncovered a story of great poignancy. Moses, having seen his sister and brother die, knew that his own time on earth was coming to a close. He prayed to G-d to appoint a successor: "May the Lord, G-d of the spirits of all mankind, 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."

There is, though, an obvious question. Why does this episode appear here? It should surely have been positioned seven chapters earlier, either at the point at which G-d told Moses and Aaron that they would die without entering the land, or shortly thereafter when we read of the death of Aaron.

The sages sensed two clues to the story beneath the story. The first is that it appears immediately after the episode in which the daughters of Tzelophehad sought and were granted their father's share in the land. It was this that triggered Moses' request. A Midrash explains:

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 second clue lies in G-d's words to Moses immediately before he made the request for the appointment of a successor:

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go up this mountain of Abarim and see the land I have given the Israelites. After you have seen it, you too will be gathered to your people, as your brother Aaron was..."

The italicised words are seemingly redundant. G-d was telling Moses he would soon die. Why did He need to add, "as your brother Aaron"? On this the Midrash says: this teaches us that Moses wanted to die the way Aaron did. The Ktav Sofer explains: Aaron had the privilege of knowing that his children would follow in

Please keep in mind  
Issur ben Yocho  
for a refuah shelaima

his footsteps. Elazar, his son, was appointed as High Priest in his lifetime. To this day cohanim are direct descendants of Aaron. Moses likewise longed to see one of his sons, Gershom or Eliezer, take his place as leader of the people. It was not to be. That is the story beneath the story.

It had an aftermath. In the book of Judges we read of a man named Micah who established an idolatrous cult in the territory of Ephraim and hired a Levite to officiate in the shrine. Some men from the tribe of Dan, moving north to find more suitable land for themselves, came upon Micah's house and seized both the idolatrous artefacts and the Levite, whom they persuaded to become their priest, saying, "Come with us, and be our father and priest. Isn't it better that you serve a tribe and clan in Israel as priest rather than just one man's household?"

Only at the end of the story are we told the name of the idolatrous priest: Jonathan son of Gershom son of Moses. In our texts the letter nun has been inserted into the last of these names, so that it can be read as Menasheh rather than Moses. However, the letter, unusually, is written above the line, as a superscription. The Talmud says that the nun was added to avoid besmirching the name of Moses himself, by disclosing that his grandson had become an idolatrous priest.

How are we to explain Moses' apparent failure with his own children and grandchildren? One suggestion made by the sages was that it had to do with the fact that for years he lived in Midian with his father in law Jethro who was at the time an idolatrous priest. Something of the Midianite influence re-appeared in Jonathan three generations later.

Alternatively there are hints here and there that Moses himself was so preoccupied with leading the people that he simply did not have time to attend to the spiritual needs of his children. For instance, when Jethro came to visit his son-in-law after the division of the Red Sea, he brought with him Moses' wife Tziporah and their two sons. They had not been with



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him until then.

The rabbis went further in speculating about the reason that Moses' own sister and brother Aaron and Miriam spoke negatively about him. What they were referring to, said the sages, is the fact that Moses had physically separated from his wife. He had done so because the nature of his role was such that he had to be in a state of purity the whole time because at any moment he might have to speak or be spoken to by G-d. They were, in short, complaining that he was neglecting his own family.

A third explanation has to do with the nature of leadership itself. Bureaucratic authority -- authority in virtue of office -- can be passed down from parent to child. Monarchy is like that. So is aristocracy. So are some forms of religious leadership, like the priesthood. But charismatic authority -- in virtue of personal qualities -- is never automatically handed on across the generations. Moses was a prophet, and prophecy depends almost entirely on personal qualities. That, incidentally, is why, though kingship and priesthood in Judaism were male prerogatives, prophecy was not. There were prophetesses as well as prophets. In this respect Moses was not unusual. Few charismatic leaders have children who are also charismatic leaders.

A fourth explanation offered by the sages was quite different. On principle, G-d did not want the crown of Torah to pass from parent to child in dynastic succession. Kingship and priesthood did. But the crown of Torah, they said, belongs to anyone who chooses to take hold of it and bear its responsibilities. "Moses commanded us the Torah as an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob," meaning that it belongs to all of us, not just an elite. The Talmud elaborates:

Be careful [not to neglect] the children of the poor, because from them Torah goes forth... Why is it not usual for scholars to give birth to sons who are scholars?

R. Joseph said: so that it should not be said that the Torah is their inheritance.

R. Shisha, son of R. Idi said: so that they should not be arrogant towards the community.

Mar Zutra said: because they act highhandedly against the community.

R. Ashi said: because they call people asses.

Rabina said: because they do not first utter a

blessing over the Torah.

In other words, the "crown of Torah" was deliberately not hereditary because it might become the prerogative of the rich. Or because children of great scholars might take their inheritance for granted. Or because it could lead to arrogance and contempt for others. Or because learning itself might become a mere intellectual pursuit rather than a spiritual exercise ("they do not first utter a blessing over the Torah").

However, there is a fifth factor worthy of consideration. Some of the greatest figures in Jewish history did not succeed with all their children. Abraham fathered Ishmael. Isaac and Rebecca gave birth to Esau. All twelve of Jacob's children stayed within the fold, but three of them -- Reuben, Shimon and Levi -- disappointed their father. Of Shimon and Levi he said, "Let my soul not enter their plot; let my spirit not unite with their meeting" (Gen. 49:6). On the face of it, he was dissociating himself from them. (Note however that Rashi interprets the curse as limited specifically to Zimri descendant of Shimon, and Korach, descendant of Levi.) Nonetheless, the three great leaders of the Israelites throughout the exodus -- Moses, Aaron and Miriam -- were all children of Levi.

Solomon gave birth to Rehoboam, whose disastrous leadership divided the kingdom. Hezekiah, one of Judah's greatest kings, was the father of Menasheh, one of the worst. Not all parents succeed with all their children all the time. How could it be otherwise? We each possess freedom. We are each, to some extent, who we chose to become. Neither genes nor upbringing can guarantee that we become the person our parents want us to be. Nor is it right that parents should over-impose their will on children who have reached the age of maturity.

Often this is for the best. Abraham did not become an idolater like his father Terach. Menasheh, the archetypal evil king, was grandfather to Josiah, one of the best. These are important facts. Judaism places parenthood, education and the home at the heart of its values. One of our first duties is to ensure that our children know about and come to love our religious heritage. But sometimes we fail. Children may go their own way, which is not ours. If this happens to us we should not be paralysed with guilt. Not everyone succeeded with all their children, not even Abraham or Moses or David or Solomon. Not even G-d himself. "I have raised children and brought them up but they have rebelled against Me" (Is. 1:2).

Two things rescued the story of Moses and his children from tragedy. The book of Chronicles (1 Chron. 23:16, 24:20) refers to Gershom's son not as Jonathan but as Shevual or Shuvael, which the rabbis translated as "return to G-d". In other words, Jonathan eventually repented of his idolatry and became again a faithful Jew. However far a child has drifted, he or she may in the course of time come back.

The other is hinted at in the genealogy in Numbers 3. It begins with the words, "These are the children of Aaron and Moses," but goes on to list only Aaron's children. On this the rabbis say that because Moses taught Aaron's children they were regarded as his own. In general, "disciples" are called "children".

We may not all have children. Even if we do, we may, despite our best endeavours, find them at least temporarily following a different path. But we can all leave something behind us that will live on. Some do so by following Moses' example: teaching, facilitating or encouraging the next generation. Some do so in line with the rabbinic statement that "the real offspring of the righteous are good deeds." (Rashi to Gen. 6:9)

When our children follow our path we should be grateful. When they go beyond us, we should give special thanks to G-d. And when they choose another way, we must be patient, knowing that the greatest Jew of all time had the same experience with one of his grandchildren. And we must never give up hope. Moses' grandson returned. In almost the last words of the last of the prophets, Malachi foresaw a time when G-d "will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers." The estranged will be reunited in faith and love. ©2016 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

#### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

### **Shabbat Shalom**

"Pinhas the son of Elazar, the son of Aharon Hakohen turned back My wrath from upon the children of Israel when he zealously expressed My zealously amongst them...therefore, I am giving him My covenant of peace" (Numbers 25:11,12)  
Covenant of peace!?

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

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

close to Torah'" (Avot 1, 12). Aren't zealotry and the pursuit of peace two very different values?

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

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

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

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

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

The response of two and one half tribes magnifies the theme of unity: this was not an act of rebellion and it was never their intention to replace the Sanctuary in Shiloh with their altar. They only intended

their altar to serve as a symbol of the unity of faith and nationality between the tribes on both sides of the Jordan River. Their sacrifices would be offered exclusively in the Shiloh Sanctuary.

Pinhas demonstrates that he is a successful mediator and peace maker, revealing the essence of his personality as a true Kohen and lover of peace who, when younger, had been forced by extreme circumstances to act out of character and behave as a zealot.

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

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

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

Whatever the true character of Pinhas was, one message is clear. Even if an exceptional, momentary act of zealotry is necessary in extreme circumstances, fanaticism must neither be our national norm, nor our national goal. Our norm and our goal must always be in line with G-d's covenant of peace! ©2016 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

#### **RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ**

## **Shabbat Shalom Weekly**

**W**hen Moshe was told that he was about to die, he said to G-d: "Let G-d, the G-d of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation" (Numbers 17:16).

The Midrash elaborates and tells us that Moshe requested of the Almighty, "You know that the mind of one individual is not similar to that of another. Appoint a leader over the congregation who will be able to deal with every individual according to his mind" (Bamidbar Rabbah 21:15 cited by Rashi).

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz commented that

while a public speaker might play a major role in influencing others, he is not a true leader. A true leader is one who understands every person individually and deals with each one accordingly.

The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 21:2) states regarding this verse: "Just as the facial features of people are different, so too are their faculties of thought." For this reason, Moshe requested that G-d choose a leader who would be capable of dealing with every person according to his individual mentality.

Rav Mendel Kotzker understood that we can learn a lesson from this Midrash to avoid feuds and fights over differing opinions. By realizing that just as no one is ever disturbed by the fact that others do not have his exact facial features, we can appreciate and accept that no two people will ever agree on all matters. *Dvar Torah based on Love Your Neighbor by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin © 2016 Rabbi K. Packouz and aish.com*

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

## **Wein Online**

**T**he count of the Jewish people that appears in this week's Torah reading occurs after a long string of unpleasant incidents and tragedies in this final period of their sojourn in the Sinai desert. The simple understanding of this sequence of events and subsequent count of the people is that after so many had died in the desert; Moshe had to have an accurate number of the Jewish people before their entry into the Land of Israel.

But on deeper reflection, it is possible to see a more subtle message that is very relevant to our times and circumstances. It is easy, almost understandable, for people – nations and individuals – to lose heart after a series of reverses and tragedies occur. There arises a feeling of helplessness, frustration and eventual surrender to the unpleasant realities that surrounded them.... and continue to surround them. There is an inner human voice that always whispers: "What is the use of going on and continuing to struggle, or even of living itself?"

Despondency reigns supreme in the human psyche. It is no accident that depression, unfortunately, is such a widespread clinical disease in the Western world today. For after all, life is complicated and laden with intractable problems and issues. We find it so much easier to memorialize the dead than to inspire and consecrate the living.

The Torah comes to concentrate once more on the numbers of the living; the generation that did not perish in the desert and would conquer and inherit its promised homeland, against all odds and many enemies. It is for that reason that Moshe counts the Jewish people now after all of the difficulties in the desert, in order to assert that the task is to concentrate on the future and not wallow in the misfortunes of the past.

The Jewish people, and in fact many nations of the world, invested greatly in memorializing the Holocaust and its victims. But even the recently departed great memorializer of the Holocaust, Elie Wiesel, told me in Miami Beach fifty years ago that the Holocaust and its memories, museums, literature and academic disciplines would be of value only if it helped build a stronger and more vital and committed Jewish people.

As important as memory is – and it certainly is very important – it alone would not guarantee Jewish survival in the future. After the Holocaust the task of the Jewish people in the Diaspora and in the nascent Jewish state of Israel was to somehow rebuild and revitalize itself; to disperse the clouds of pessimism which engulfed us and to infuse the Jewish people with a can-do spirit that would carry them forward.

We, like our ancestors in the desert, were reeling from the tragedy and destruction that surrounded us. Like they, we also wailed: "Is there no end to our dying?" But by counting on the will of the survivors of Israel – every one of whom counts and is counted – the mood changed and our future became brighter than ever imagined before. This is a profound lesson that the Torah teaches us in this week's parsha. ©2016 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

#### ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

## Tishbi will Answer

*Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

**W**ith 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 Kushirot 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

**A**fter Pinhas killed the Jewish man and Midianite woman who were committing immoral acts, G-d applauds Pinhas, granting him a "covenant of peace (brit shalom)" (Numbers 25:12). Can we deduce from G-d's approval, that zealotry is desirable?

Netziv (R. Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin, 19th C.) sees the brit shalom as a counter measure to zealotry. He notes "that the nature of his (Pinhas) 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.

Perhaps his idea can be taken a step further. Rather than viewing the Pinhas story as an approval of other acts of zealotry, it may teach the opposite. Zealotry is limited to the case of Pinhas, who received the brit shalom from G-d. In other cases, where G-d does not offer His explicit imprimatur, zealotry is prohibited.

Note that the ancestor of Pinhas disapproved of zealotry. Pinhas is a descendant of Levi who participated in the decimation of the city of Shekhem. His father Yaakov (Jacob) was incensed, and on his deathbed disavowed any connection to Levi's brutal act (Genesis 49:6).

Note also that Pinhas' descendant, the prophet Eliyahu (Elijah) may have been removed from his position after becoming over-zealous. This occurs when Eliyahu, in this week's Haftarah, declares to G-d "zealous have I been for the Lord...for the children of Israel have forsaken your covenant" (I Kings 19:10). G-d then indicates to Eliyahu that His spirit is not found in the wind, the earthquake or fire ...rather G-d's presence is best felt through "a still small voice" (I Kings 19:11,12). After Eliyahu persists in his commitment to being zealous, G-d tells him that he will be replaced by his student, Elisha (I Kings 19:14-16).

In fact, a reading of the Book of Joshua reveals that Pinhas comes full circle. Years after his zealous

act, Pinhas brokers a truce between Israel and the tribes of Reuven, Gad and half of Menasheh (Joshua 22). Some commentaries suggest that only after Pinhas' intercession, an intercession which avoids a split within the Jewish people, is Pinhas completely embraced as a leader (Tosafot, Zevachim 101b).

The pathway to redemption is not the way of the Pinhas in our portion, but the Pinhas in the Book of Joshua. This pathway to redemption will reach its crescendo when Eliyahu, the descendant of Pinhas, returns parents to children and children to parents, the antithesis of zealotry, as he announces the coming of the Messiah (Malakhi 3:23-24). ©2016 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 LABEL LAM

### Dvar Torah

"**A**nd Moshe spoke to HASHEM, saying: 'Let HASHEM, the G-d of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, who may go out before them, and who may come in before them, and who may lead them out, and who may bring them in; that the congregation of HASHEM not be as sheep which have no shepherd.' And HASHEM said unto Moshe: 'Take for yourself Yehoshua the son of Nun, a man of spirit, and press your hand upon him...' (Bamidbar 27:16-18)

"Take for yourself: Encourage him verbally, [and say,] 'Fortunate are you that you have merited to lead the Children of the Omnipresent!'

"a man of spirit (ruchos): As you requested; someone able to deal with the character of each and every individual." -- Rashi

Moshe is not only told who it is that he should choose as a leader to replace him. We are privy to details of the replacement process. The Torah opens a window for us to understand why Yehoshua was chosen and how he was invited to serve. These are instructive points for seeking future leaders for all generations. What does it take to be a leader of the Jewish People?

So much is revealed in these few words of Rashi. Moshe is told to encourage Yehoshua with words. That is how he is to be taken. The text of that appeal is telling, "Fortunate are you that you have merited to lead the Children of the Omnipresent!" Not just anyone would be sufficiently motivated to accept such a giant yoke of responsibility.

All that weight could only rest comfortable on the shoulders of someone who appreciates the inestimable value of caring for the Children of the Almighty.

Another vital quality is that this leader is not just a leader of the masses. The group is made up of

individuals and a leader has to be able to relate to and communicate appropriately with each and every individual. The following story, related to me by one of my Rebbeim may just provide a charming portrait of both of these critical qualities of true Torah leadership.

His wife was driving through the back roads of Rockland County one Sunday with a car filled with kids, her kids. She pulled over by a sign advertising "garage sale" and all the children followed her out of the car. It was an impressively large parade of little people.

The woman hosting the garage sale exclaimed in amazement, "Are these all your children?" The Rebbetzin responded poignantly, "No!" They are G -- d's but I have been given the responsibility to watch over them and see to it they grow up right and fulfill their G-d given potential!"

I can't say the garage sale lady was ready for such a grandiose response but it reveals the thinking of the Rebbetzin and lands a great and powerful lesson. A parent needs to know and appreciate these kids are not ours! They are really G-d's! We don't own them! They are not our property? "Fortunate are you that you have merited to lead the Children of the Omnipresent!"

This pertains to parents as well as teachers and more. Whoever realizes that each person needs to be appreciated, not as a number, but as a unique Divine Soul has already applied for a position of leadership. We can also now appreciate that leadership opportunities are not reserved just for heads of nation states but are readily available for anyone who cares to care that much. ©2016 Rabbi S. Wolbe zt"l and the AishDas Society

#### MACHON ZOMET

### Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Esti Rosenberg, Head of the Midrasha for Women, Migdal Oz; Translated by Moshe Goldberg

**T**his week we have the privilege of reading about Eliyahu in the Haftarah, which gives us an opportunity to compare two figures, Pinchas and Eliyahu. In what way are they the same, and how do they differ?

We are told that Pinchas "was zealous about My vengeance" [Bamidbar 25:11], while Eliyahu said, "I was zealous for G-d" [Melachim I 19:10]. The zealous reaction against illicit sexual acts leads Pinchas to react quickly, clearly showing the nation the error of their way. In return, the Holy One, Blessed be He, makes a covenant of peace with him. The Haftarah, on the other hand, describes the end of Eliyahu's long career of defending G-d's honor, when the Holy One, Blessed be He, replaces him by Elisha.

What is the difference between Pinchas and Eliyahu?

The Holy One, Blessed be He, testifies that Pinchas "was zealous about My vengeance among them, so that I did not destroy Bnei Yisrael with My

zeal." By his action, Pinchas brings the Holy One, Blessed be He, closer to the people. Not only does he take an extreme position in favor of G-d, by doing so he stops the plague that is taking place, and in that way he forms a stronger bond between the Holy One, Blessed be He, and the people. Pinchas succeeds in bringing the word of G-d to the world and to the nation, strongly and with his hand held high, while at the same time he acts within the nation -- "He was zealous about My vengeance among them." Eliyahu, on the other hand, is not able to act within the people, rather he takes the side of the Creator while he remains alone, in despair, in the desert. "For Bnei Yisrael abandoned Your covenant... And I am alone" [Melachim I 19:10]. As opposed to Pinchas, who remains deeply attached to the nation, Eliyahu leaves the people. The Midrash criticizes Eliyahu: "Eliyahu defended the honor of the father (the Holy One, Blessed be He) but not the honor of the son (the nation of Yisrael)... He said to Eliyahu, I cannot accept your prophecy." [Mechilta]. The jealousy and fanaticism of Pinchas is acceptable, while the jealousy and fanaticism of Eliyahu is not.

The Holy One, Blessed be He, reveals Himself to Eliyahu -- "After the wind there was an earthquake, but G-d was not in the earthquake, and after the quake there was fire, but G-d was not in the fire. And after the fire there was a thin sound of silence" [Melachim I 19:12]. G-d appears through the silence and teaches Eliyahu about the proper relationship between extremism, moderation, and leadership. Malbim is very precise in his commentary:

"He showed Eliyahu that in wind, earthquakes, and fire G-d does not appear -- but only in a thin sound of silence. From this His messengers and prophets should learn not to raise a tumult, not to make loud noise, and not to light flames... For G-d will send His prophets to appear in a thin silent sound, in order to draw the nation to Him with bonds of love and soft words."

In the post-modern world, where clear and definitive values lose from their importance -- the absolute and extremist figures of Pinchas and Eliyahu take on a special shine and glow. But it is important for us to be careful and not to lose our contact with the community through our actions. Let us declare the word of G-d in a clear voice, but always with bonds of love and with blessings. This is a difficult task which requires courage, truth, clarity, and faith.

Pinchas "was zealous about G-d's vengeance - among them" -- Both parts of this verse are necessary and neither half stands alone.

**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 Pinchas' "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 Pinchas 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 Pinchas' 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 Pinchas 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 Pinchas killed, had done) was inappropriate. Why was Pinchas being belittled for what he did?

Shortly before this part of the Talmud's elucidation of what happened, we are told that Pinchas challenged G-d for having killed 24,000 in the plague (before it was stopped by Pinchas' 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 Pinchas 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 Pinchas 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 Pinchas 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 Pinchas 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 SHLOMO RESSLER**

## Weekly Dvar

**P**arshat 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.

