

+++++

**The Lower East Side
Parshat HaShavua sheet**

*A collection of Divrei Torah
from around the Internet*

+++++

=====

Parshat Pinchas

=====

Latest time for Kriyat Shema – 9:21

LOYAL LEADERSHIP

By Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetzky

At the end of Parshas Pinchos, Hashem tell Moshe Rabbeinu about the forthcoming end of his life, and the passing of the leadership to the next generation. Moshe, concerned about the future of his people, asks a request, “Hashem should choose a leader who will go and come in front of them, (the Jewish Nation) and the congregation of Israel should not be like a flock that does not have to them a shepherd.”

Seemingly, Moshe Rabbeinu uses a few extra words. Instead of simply saying that the Jews should not be like “a flock without a shepherd,” he adds the words “asher ein lahem roeh” that does not have to them a shepherd.” Why the extra words?

At the outbreak of World War One, A young man came to the great Gaon and leader of European Jewery, Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky for a blessing not to be inducted into the Russian army. The hazards of war wee terrifying, and the army usually kept soldiers in their ranks for decades. After conversing with the teen for a bit, the Rav asked, “Do you wear tzitzis.” “No.” came the reply. “Do your put on tefillin every day.” “No.” “Do you observe the Shabbos.” The boy, looking down, embarrassed, and in a whisper he answered again, “No.” Silence permeated the room and the boy stood in fear of what the holy tzaddik would tell him. Instead, after a few moments, Rav Grodzinsky looked up at him, and in a calming, loving voice, he said, “I bless you that the Soviet authorities should be just as disappointed in you as I am.” Only a few weeks later, the boy came back to the Rav and told him, “Rebbe, your bracha worked! I was rejected by the Soviet army!” He then lifted his shirt to show the Rav his tzitzis. Needless to say, he returned to the path of observance.

My grandfather, Rav Binyamin Kamenetzky zt”l would explain based upon a passage in the Sefer Kehilos Yitzchok. Rav Jacob Joseph, a great orator, was appointed as the maggid of the city of Vilna in 1883, five years before coming to the United States to assume the position of chief Rabbi of the city of New York. In his inaugural address, he answered the question as follows. One who tends to his own sheep does not care about the sheep per se, rather he worries about his bottom line. His concern for an injured sheep would be more for his bottom line than for the welfare of is animal.

But one who is watching sheep for someone else, doesn’t care much about the bottom line. The sheep are not his, and he has no vested interest in them. His tending to the sheep is more idealistic, as he is concerned about the actual health and well-being of the sheep.

The same, explained Rav Joseph, is with leaders of people. There are many nations in the world – each one with a different leader. Some do their job well, but they ultimately care about their bottom line. The individual needs of the many citizens don’t concern that all that much – as long as their position is secure and they win the next election.

Moshe wasn’t worried that the Jews would be left without someone taking charge. He knew that knew that there will be a leader. He wanted to ensure that the leader was a leader “of them.” The new leader had to take into account the plight of every single Jew, each personal situation, and every individual’s struggles and challenges. He wanted the leader to celebrate with them and revel with joy in their accomplishments. Therefore, he implored Hashem, “Let the Jews not be like a flock that does not have **to them** a leader.” Moshe insisted that the leader be a leader “for them.”

Moshe, the ultimate leader of the Jewish Nation, knew to instill this important trait in the future of our leaders for generations to come.

True Zealotry

by Rabbi Avraham Kovel

What drives someone to risk everything for a principle? To act when everyone else freezes? The story of Pinchas reveals the anatomy of moral courage—and uncovers the divine signal that calls each of us to our unique mission.

At the end of last week's Torah portion, after failing to curse the Jewish people, the wicked prophet Bilaam and the Moabite King Balak draw up a twisted scheme to destroy the nation from the inside out. The daughters of Midian and Moab infiltrate the Jewish camp and, using progressive levels of seduction, lead the Jewish men to promiscuity and idol worship. As punishment, God sends a plague among the Israelites, killing 24,000.

The episode reaches its climax when Zimri, a Jewish prince of the tribe of Shimon, takes a Midianite princess to the front of the Tabernacle where Moses and the elders hold court. According to the Midrash, Zimri challenges Moshe, "Son of Amram, is this woman permitted or forbidden? Now if you say that she is forbidden because she is a Midianite, remember that the very woman who is your wife is a Midianite; and who permitted you to have her?!"

Taken aback, Moses stumbles and the proper response slips from his mind. Then, in broad daylight, before the eyes of the holiest men in history, Zimri proceeds to engage in public cohabitation. Witnessing this atrocity, godly fury courses through the blood of Aaron's grandson, Pinchas. He picks up a spear and, in one mighty thrust, pierces through the shameless prince and his Midianite mistress, killing them on the spot and ending the plague. As a reward, God gives Pinchas His "Covenant of Peace" and entry into the eternal Priesthood.

This dramatic sequence culminating in public execution represents a unique historical event we do not learn from out of context. Pinchas' act of zealotry was only permitted within these specific circumstances:

- The sin of Zimri was so extreme and the consequences so dire that what would normally constitute murder became necessary justice.
- Unlike typical acts of passion and rage, Pinchas acted purely on behalf of God. We see this selflessness in the verse: "when he displayed vengeance for My vengeance." The apparently superfluous word "My vengeance" conveys that Pinchas' vengeance was purely for God's sake—he had no ulterior motive.
- Finally, he acted from his own inner conviction. According to the Rambam, "The decision to act zealously must be arrived at independently, without influence from Beis Din (Jewish Court). He must act on his own." Seek counsel, and zealotry becomes homicide. Act alone from pure conscience, and execution becomes mitzvah.

This last condition is especially fascinating. Why does Jewish law require the zealot to act without asking permission? Because authentic divine calling cannot be validated by committee—it burns within the individual soul alone. The very fact that you feel compelled to ask others whether you should care about something proves it's not your true calling. Your real mission will feel so urgent, so obviously necessary, that external validation becomes irrelevant.

From this law about zealotry, we can extract a profound lesson about trusting our deepest convictions: The problems that torment your conscience, that rob your sleep and fuel your prayers—these aren't random emotional reactions. They're divine GPS coordinates, marking the exact spot where your unique mission awaits. When your conscience screams that something is fundamentally wrong with the world, when an injustice eats at you to your core, when your soul burns with outrage—that's your divine calling to take action. You must pick up your metaphorical spear and charge forward.

At the turn of the 19th century, Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin came to his teacher, the Vilna Gaon, terrified at the spiritual destruction the Enlightenment wreaked upon European Jewry. He exclaimed, "We need to open a Yeshiva!" At that time, formal Torah learning institutions were unheard of. The Gaon said no. Months later, Rabbi Chaim returned more exasperated, pleading to build a yeshiva. The Gaon refused. The third time, Rabbi Chaim stated plainly, "I'm opening a Yeshiva." The Gaon replied, "You have my blessing. Now go." The Volozhin Yeshiva Rabbi Chaim founded became the model for all future Torah learning institutions.

A century later, in 1917, Sarah Schenirer, a Polish seamstress, saw that while a rich system of Jewish education existed for men, women were completely neglected in their Jewish education. She started a school for 25 girls in her seamstress studio. Jews from across Europe heard of her revolutionary program and some protested to the Chofetz Chaim, the accepted leader at that time. As they described her "heinous" actions, the Chofetz Chaim became overjoyed, asking, "Where do I sign my support?"

Her initiative became what we know today as the "Bais Yaakov" movement. By 1939, the Torah community had established 250 Bais Yaakov schools with over 40,000 students. Had such a system not been in place, Jewish identity may have been lost entirely during the Holocaust and post-war years. Today, Bais Yaakov has become an accepted part of every religious Jewish girl's upbringing—a complete education system rivaling the men's Yeshiva system in rigor and preparation for Jewish life.

Rabbi Yechezkel Sarna, addressing a gathering of Israel's Torah giants, said: "Everybody in this room thinks it was his grandfather who did the most for the Jewish Nation in the last one hundred years. I'm here to tell you it was none of them. The one who did the most for the Jewish Nation in the last one hundred years never learned a page of Talmud! When I mention the name, you will all agree." The name was Sarah Schenirer. And they all agreed.

When we look out at our world today, we see many problems. Many of us feel we want to make change—to leave the world better than we found it. But where to start? The range of choices can feel overwhelming. But don't spend your life in indecision, passively consulting mentors about which problem to tackle without ever taking initiative.

Instead, look within. God has implanted a mission within you that only you can bring to fruition. What injustice or inefficiency makes you burn like Pinchas with godly fury? The very reason certain issues ignite your soul while others leave you indifferent is because God gave you the sensitivity necessary to take action and create change in that specific area.

Of course, we can't match Pinchas' spiritual greatness, and most situations don't require his type of split-second intervention. But the principle remains the same: when something ignites your soul with divine fury, that burning passion signals your calling. Like Pinchas, act on that fire without seeking endless validation—but unlike his emergency situation, you have the luxury of channeling that urgency through careful planning that honors your responsibilities and builds lasting change.

To identify and channel your divine fire wisely, ask yourself: What core issue burns within me? Has this injustice tormented me for years, not just months? Do I possess or can I develop the skills to address it meaningfully? Can I pursue this calling while fulfilling my obligations to family and community?

When you find your godly calling through this thoughtful process, then attack it with everything you have and leave the world better than you found it.

It is Normal for People to Think Differently

By Rabbi Yissocher Frand

In Parshas Pinchas, Moshe asks Hashem to appoint an appropriate successor: “May Hashem, G-d of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the assembly...” [Bamidbar 26:6]. Rashi alludes to the Medrash Tanchuma, which comments, “Just as the faces of no two people are alike, so too the thought processes of no two people are alike – everyone has a mind of his own.” The Medrash wonders why Moshe refers to the Almighty here as “G-d of the spirits” (Elokai haRuchos). This is a very rare expression for referring to the Master of the Universe. What does it mean?

The Medrash explains: Moshe, as the time of his death approached, turned to the Almighty and said “Master of the Universe it is known and revealed to You that everyone has a mind of his own, with different wants and needs. The Jewish people need a new leader, but You know as well as I do that they are a tough crowd. They are very opinionated and everyone has their own philosophy. They need a leader who can relate to every single person, to each individual and to his or her own way of looking at life.” This is why Moshe refers to G-d as Elokai haRuchos. You, who know the spirit of every person and how different they each are, please appoint a leader who is able to deal with the different spirits of people.

The Medrash began by saying “Just as their faces are not alike (so too their opinions are not alike).” Reb Bunim Eiger asks – why does the Medrash start out like that? We all know that people do not look alike. Why not just come right to the point: “People’s opinions are different from one another; their philosophies are different.” Why do we need the preamble “Just like their faces are not alike...?”

Reb Bunim Eiger answers (with a question): “Did it ever bother you that the person sitting next to you does not look like you?” Look around this room. No two people look the same. Does that bother anyone? The Gemara states that it is one of the wonders of creation that of all the billions of people born since the beginning of time, no two people look exactly alike. It does not bother anyone one iota.

The Medrash is saying “It does not (and it should not) bother anyone that his face is not like anyone else’s face, so why when people think differently and look at life differently do people find it so bothersome?” Why is it that we feel ‘If you do not see it my way, you are an idiot?’ The Medrash is teaching that it should NOT bother us that people think differently from one another.

“Pinchas, the son of Elazar, the son of Aharon the priest, has turned my wrath away from the Children of Israel, in that he was jealous with my jealousy among them, so that I didn’t consume the Children of Israel in my jealousy” (25:11)

Pinchas is associated with his father and grandfather because he brought honor to his ancestors through his heroic actions. Likewise, Zimri is mentioned with his father’s name and tribal affiliation because his sin brought disgrace to his family. Rabbeinu Bachya notes this and adds that we see how everything that a person does reflects on his family. The inverse is also true. A lot of what we do in life is a result of the influences that we absorb from our parents and grandparents. Pinchas grew up with the training of a Kohen and with the example of Aharon, which is why he was the one person who was inspired to come forward when there was a need. The connection to his grandfather went both ways – he learned how to act from Aharon and he brought honor to Aharon by following in his footsteps. The reward given to Pinchas was that he received a blessing of peace and the right to serve as a Kohen. These two go hand in hand because a kohen’s job is to bring peace between Hashem and His people by serving as the agent for earning their atonement. When a person sins, it creates a distance between him and Hashem, but through repentance and bringing offerings to Hashem, he can bridge that gap and re-connect. The Kohen, through his role as the intermediary in the Mikdash, is the one who is the source of peace for the entire nation.

“The daughters of Tzelofchad, son of Chefer, son of Gilad, son of Machir, son of Menashe, of the families of Menashe son of Yosef drew near – and these are the names of his daughters: Machla, Noa, Chagla, Milka and Tirtza (27:1)

Tzelofchad’s daughters were going to enter Eretz Yisrael. Why did they need to own property there? If they loved the land so much, they should have been happy with just living there. R’ Moshe Feinstein writes in *Darash Moshe* that if a person really loves something, he wants to own it and have it for himself. Borrowing it is not enough to satisfy his love. That is why they needed to own a piece of land even though they would have entered Eretz Yisrael regardless. This is also the reason behind the mitzvah for every individual to write his own Sefer Torah to buy sefarim, which the Rosh explains is an extension of this mitzvah. We should have an appreciation and a love for Torah that motivates us to buy and own sefarim and a Sefer Torah rather than borrow them. Perhaps this may even be a litmus test of how much a person appreciates something. If a person is willing to pay for something, it shows that it is dear to him and that he truly appreciates it.

“And you shall offer a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, of a pleasant aroma to Hashem: thirteen young bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs a year old; they shall be without blemish” (29:13)

Over the course of seven days of Sukkos, seventy bulls were brought as special offerings for the holiday. Rashi explains that these corresponded to the seventy nations of the world. Since Sukkos is the time when Hashem renders judgment on the amount of rainfall that the world will receive in the coming year, these seventy offerings were meant as a request to Hashem to spare the entire world from drought and thirst. Chazal taught that the nations of the world have no understanding of what they lost when the Bais HaMikdash was destroyed. The Bais HaMikdash helped them too because korbanos were brought there on their behalf. However, these seventy bulls were brought in successively decreasing numbers: thirteen on the first day, twelve on the second day, eleven on the third day, etc. Rashi explains that this was meant to be a sign of the eventual disappearance of our enemies.

“On the eighth day you shall have a solemn assembly; you shall do no servile work” (29:35)

There are two holidays in the Torah which are called Atzeres: Shavuos, which is fifty days after Pesach, and Shemini Atzeres, which is immediately after Sukkos. Why is there no similar gap between Sukkos and Shemini Atzeres? The Midrash Tanchuma explains that travel is not hard during the summer season, so asking people to travel to Yerushalayim twice is not a major demand. However, Sukkos is followed by the rainy season, when travel is difficult. Hashem decided to make the additional holiday right away so as not to ask too much of the people. This is an illustration of how the mitzvos are not meant to make life difficult for us. Hashem is sensitive to us and set the rules of the Torah up in a way that is meant to be pleasant.

By Rabbi Mayer Friedman

Gadlus Haadam

By Sheldon Stern

In 1981, Phil Collins scored a major hit with, "In the Air Tonight." "I can feel it in the air tonight, Oh L-rd, And I've been waiting for this moment for all my life, Oh L-rd." Sir Paul had a song on the Let It Be album, "I've Got a Feeling." Well I've got a feeling that Hashem is making His final preparations for Moshiach's arrival. Of course, I could be totally wrong, but if I'm correct two icons deserve the lion's share of the credit. That would be the Vilna Gaon and the Baal Shem Tov or the Besht and the Gaon just as it could be Aaron and Moshe, neither would ever petition for first billing. What shouldn't be lost, however, are the contributions from so many other giants. Miami University in Oxford, Ohio is called the "cradle of coaches" because an inordinate number of legendary football coaches got their start at that academy. Sladbodka could be called the "Cradle of Gedolim" because a staggering panoply of Torah heavyweights "cut their teeth" there. How about these alumni, Rav Aharon Kotler, Rav Yitzchok Hutner and Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky? They and their colleagues, such as Rabbi Avigdor Miller, largely shaped Judaism in the United States and beyond. And one man was behind all this, Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, BKA "The Alter of Slodbodka." In his approach to Mussar the Alter stressed the concept of Gadlus Haadam. Napoleon said, "What man can conceive, man can achieve." No, not that Napoleon. I'm referring to the American author, Napoleon Hill. This principle cuts a wide swath through our Parsha.

First we consider the Sedrah's eponymous character. At the end of Parshas Balak he assuaged G-d's "anger" by dispatching the two offenders Zimri and Kazbi. And in our Parsha, as his just dessert for stanching a horrific plague, Pinchas was accorded the status of Kohen. Yes, he was Aaron's grandson but since he had already been born when the institution of Kehuna was inaugurated he was on the outside looking in. Not to worry. To borrow from John Houseman's wonderful commercials in the 80's for the investment firm Smith Barney, "He became a Kohen the old-fashioned way he earned it." So this is a prime example of Gadlas Haadam, a man who transcended his limits. The Gemara in Megilla says, "Wherever you see the greatness of Hashem, you see His humility." Hashem is our doting father and He wants nothing more than to remunerate us for our efforts. I recall Rav Moshe praising in print a Chiddush from his son Dovid, yes that's Rav Dovid Feinstein ZTL. But Rav Moshe, in addition to being the Gadol Hador, was a proud papa and justifiably so. And Hashem sees us in the same way.

Following this, Hashem commanded Moshe to take a census. This too epitomizes Gadlus Haadam, but I'd like to discuss this section at the end. Now we'll focus on the request by the Bnos Tzelopchad for their father's inheritance. John had a song in his post-Beatles career, "Woman is the @#\$X%(you get the point) of the World." But not in Judaism. Our religion is a meritocracy and in no way are females second class citizens as they are in so many other cultures. Therefore they argued their case well and Hashem, serving as the Arbiter, ruled in their favor. Gadlas Haadam can certainly extend to the fairer sex, as through their efforts the Bnos Tzelafchad caused Hashem to "rewrite" His script.

Next, Hashem told Moshe that Yehoshua would replace him as leader and not his son(s.) And this isn't the norm in most societies. Generally the son takes over, whether or not he's worthy. Harry Chapin wrote in his opus, "Taxi," "Well another man might have been angry and another man might have been hurt." Yes, a lesser man would have been upset especially in light of the fact that Aaron's son did step into his shoes but from Moshe "seldom, make that never, was heard a discouraging word." Shlomo Hamelech wrote Mishlei 27:18, "Whoever tends a fig tree will eat its fruit and he who guards his master will be honored." For our leader the Torah's truth was inviolate and so he understood that Yehoshua was more than deserving of this lofty perch. So again this was Gadlas Haadam a man, Yehoshua, boldly going where no one had tread before.

The Parsha ended with a long overview of the Yomim Tovim. So how is this a manifestation of Gadlas Haadam? As we said above, Hashem's greatness is reflected in His humility. Shabbos declares that Hashem created the world, but He made the Yomim Tovim our province. To that point we declare, "These are the festivals of Hashem, holy convocations that you(that means us) call them in their time." To be sure, they are Hashem's festivals but He gave us the power to decide when they should take place. Talk about ennobling. Hashem has the "whole world in His hand" but he wants to share it with His special children.

So now we can return to the census. And this is the predominant theme of Bamidbar. In fact, it's why the Sefer is also called Numbers. So what does that mean? In his latter years, before suffering a stroke, the Lubavicher Rebbe would hand out dollars to well-wishers and advice seekers on Sundays at 770. He was asked, "Don't you get tired standing for hours?" He responded, "One doesn't get tired counting diamonds." That beautifully expresses the way Hashem views us, but it goes even further. The Gemara teaches that if someone buys produce in bulk, e.g. a Kilo of potatoes, one set of laws apply, but if they're purchased in number e.g. fifty olives this is called a Davor Shebiminyan and it's a whole new ballgame. When we count something the object gains significance which is why Moshe counted the Jews indirectly using the half Shekel. And this is why a direct count is dangerous. If the Jews were counted that way they would gain prominence and become subject to the forces of evil. But Hashem loves to count His children. I'd like to bring a different point to the fore. In discussing Yehudah's lineage, Er and Onan are mentioned. Now one would think they shouldn't be included in the Torah's pantheon. Either of them could have been in the Moshiach tree but they blew it. But that's not the way Hashem sees them. During the 2024-25 NHL season Alex Ovechkin eclipsed Wayne Gretzsky's career goal record, something few believed could ever happen. But "The Great One's" place in the record books remains untarnished because his assist record is way beyond anyone's reach.

In hockey a player gets a point for either a goal or an assist i.e. setting up a goal. So too in life. Er and Onan didn't score the goal, but their action of marrying Tamar enabled the line of Moshiach to continue and this is enough for them to secure a place in Hashem's record book, the Torah. Interestingly, when the Torah speaks of punishment it uses the term *Kareis*, spiritual excision, rather than death. Death is merely a transitional state but *Kareis* is infinitely worse. The esteemed actor Mandy Patinkin recently pledged allegiance to the "just" cause of the Palestinians. In so doing he has cut himself off from his people, and it follows that he will likely be cut off from the ethereal delights of *Olam Habo*. Last week I paid a shiva call to my cousin. Her father was my mother's brother, but they had another brother, Willie. He was happily married, but wasn't blessed with children. Some in the frum community tend to look down on those who don't fill in all the boxes of success. So let me share the following. My son often attends a shul near the main LES community. I went there once and started shmoozing with the Rabbi. Somehow my uncle's name came up and the Rabbi was ready to bow down to me. You're Willie's nephew?" I loved him. Yes, as my mother would remind me, Willie was brilliant, but what set him apart was his humility. I don't recall him ever saying a word about himself. So, by no means was he a failure in life. Hashem sent Shmuel Hanovi to the domicile of Yishai to anoint the king who would follow Saul. When Shmuel arrived he saw Yishai's Bchor, Eliav and he was duly impressed, certain that this was the chosen one. Hashem told him these most powerful words of Mussar, "I don't see things the way you see them." If Shmuel was thusly chastised, how much more so do commoners like you and I warrant rebuke? Let's train ourselves to see the good, no the Gadlas, in every man. You never know if that person whom you, as Bowie wrote, "spit on as he tries to change his world," just might be our long-awaited Moshiach.

A Daily Challenge

By Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

Which *pasuk* in the Torah is the cornerstone for our entire *avodas Hashem*? *Chazal* respond in a medrash that it is the *pasuk* in *Parshas Pinchas* that mandates the daily offering, and encompasses the service of Hashem in its entirety: "*Es hakeves echad taaseh baboker, ve'es hakeves hasheini taaseh bein haarbayim*," (*Bamidbar* 28:4). What is so significant about the daily sacrifice that warrants its distinction as the foundation of our *avodas Hashem*?

There are two different challenges in *avodas Hashem*. Special occasions, such as *yomim noraim*, and *shalosh regalim* arise which obligate us to reach new heights of spirituality. There is, however, a second aspect of *avodas Hashem* and this is the daily *avodah*. It is relatively simple to reach spiritual heights on sporadic occasions. On a daily basis, without a specific excitement of the moment, it is much more difficult to attain such levels. It is this latter aspect of *avodas Hashem* that is symbolized by the *korban tamid*. It is neither the *korban Pesach* nor the *avodas Yom Hakippurim* that is singled out as the cornerstone of our *avodah*. Rather, emphasis is placed on our ongoing commitment every morning and evening.

It is the significance of the *korban tamid* that has linked this *mitzvah* to many tragedies in our history. One of the events commemorated and mourned on *Shiva Asar beTamuz* is the cessation of this *korban*. In contradistinction, we do not commemorate the termination of the *korban Pesach* or the *avodas Yom Hakippurim*.

Chazal relate to us another tragedy associated with the *korban tamid* (*Bava Kama* 82b). During the internal wars of the *Chashmonaim*, even though *Yerushalayim* was under siege, the *korban tamid* continued to be offered. The lambs for the *korbanos* were lifted over the walls of *Yerushalayim* in a basket. Eventually the *Chashmonaim* on the outside decided to stop this procedure, and trick their fellow Jews inside the walls by placing a pig inside the basket.

This was not merely a trick by warring factions within the Jewish people, but also a sign from Hashem regarding the deteriorated spiritual state of the Jews. A pig is the only non-kosher animal that has split hooves but does not chew its cud. It appears kosher, yet upon examining its inner being we realize that it is not. The Jewish people continued their external service of the *korban tamid*, but their inner-selves had become disqualified. Their offering *korbanos* while fighting amongst themselves was symbolized by the pig.