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Parshat Pinchas

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DAUGHTERS-AND-LAW

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

There is a fascinating sequence of events in this week's portion that is analyzed by the Medrash and expounded upon by every major Torah commentator.

At the beginning of Chapter 27, the daughters of Zelophchad appeal to Moshe. Their father died in the desert, but he was not amongst the insurgents who rebelled against Moshe during Korach's uprising. He died of his own sin and left no sons. The daughters want an inheritance in the Land of Israel.

Moshe did not remember the law and consulted with Hashem. He advised Moshe that Zelophchad's daughters had a valid argument. They were entitled to a portion of the land that had been allotted for Zelophchad.

The ensuing section of the weekly Parsha has Hashem reminding Moshe that he will not enter the Land of Israel. Immediately a conversation follows. In verses 15-18 Moshe pleads to Hashem, "the Lord of all spirits and flesh to appoint a man over the assembly who will go out before them and go in before them; so they shall not be like sheep that have no shepherd."

Rashi quotes a Medrash that links the two episodes. He explains that after Moshe saw that Zelophchad's daughters were entitled to inherit the Land, he felt that the time had come to ask for the torch of leadership to be passed to his own children. This does not come to pass. Hashem tells Moshe to bestow authority to his own disciple, Joshua, who ultimately leads the Jewish Nation into Israel.

Many Biblical commentators are puzzled by the connection of the request of Zelophchad's daughters and Moshe's request. Why did the former prompt the latter?

Second, were Moshe's sons worthy of leadership or not? It seems that only after Moshe saw that Zelophchad's daughter's inherited did he say, "the time has come that I shall ask for my needs." Why would the episode or conveyance of land to Zelophchad's kin affect Moshe's opinion of his own children's leadership abilities?

The pious and humble Tzadik, Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan of Radin, known as the Chofetz Chaim, was once riding a train to Radin. He wore a simple cap and traveled alone, and hardly anyone knew who he was. A middle-aged Jew sat down beside him and asked him where he was going. The Chofetz Chaim answered softly, "to Radin." The man was excited. "Do you know the saintly Chofetz Chaim? I am going to Radin just to see him!" The Chofetz Chaim was unimpressed. "M'nyeh," he shrugged. "I don't think he is so saintly." The visitor was so appalled that he slapped the old man and left his seat shouting. "How dare you make light of the leader of our generation!" A week later the man came to the humble abode of the great Tzadik. Lo and behold, the old man from the train was sitting by the table in the dining room. The man collapsed in shock. He could not stop apologizing for the incident on the train when the Chofetz Chaim halted him. "Do not worry, you taught me a great lesson," said the sage. "One may not even slander himself."

R' Mordechai of Czernobel (d.1837) explains the connection. Moshe was concerned that the very sin that prohibited him entry into the Land of Israel would also prevent his children a chance at inheriting leadership. When Hashem told Moshe that Zelophchad's daughters shall not suffer for any past misdeeds, he reconsidered his own situation. He realized that his problem and sin had nothing to do with his children. They should not suffer from his humility and self-effacing.

We all may get down on ourselves at one time or another. But our children look up to us. We must show that we have confidence in ourselves. The qualities that they believe we possess are those that we must pass on to them.

A Peaceful Hero

By Rabbi Berel Wein

Pinchas is a tainted hero. Rashi records for us that the tribes of Israel, especially the tribe of Shimon, complained that someone who is a descendant of “one who fattened calves for paganism and dares kill a head of a tribe in Israel” should not be entitled to any honors. The Lord, so to speak, comes to his defense and grants him the gift of the priesthood – to him and his descendants – and also the supreme blessing of peace.

The Torah records his genealogy as being from Elazar and Aharon and not from the one who “fattened calves for idolatry.” Yet, even this restoration of status and Godly confirmation of the rectitude of Pinchas is also somewhat reserved.

In the word “shalom” that marks the covenant of peace granted to Pinchas by God, the letter “vav” in this word, as it is written in the Torah, is split and cracked. He is not granted the full blessing of peace but rather a diminished portion of it. Our rabbis taught us that this is because his heroics involved violence and the taking of human life, albeit in a just and holy cause.

Peace obtained through violence and the death of others, even if those deaths are unavoidably necessary and completely justified, is always somewhat tarnished, cracked and split. Pinchas is thus completely vindicated and rehabilitated by the Torah, but a lingering resentment against his act of boldness and zealotry remains.

Pinchas reappears later in Jewish history in the book of Shoftim/Judges. There he is the High Priest and according to some opinions, the leader of the Sanhedrin as well. The Talmud records for us the tragic story of Yiftach and his daughter – in which Yiftach vowed to sacrifice the first living creature that would confront him when he returned home after the successful war against Bnei Ammon, and was first greeted by his daughter.

The Talmud is of the opinion that Yiftach’s vow could have been annulled legally by the court of Pinchas. But Pinchas insisted that Yiftach come to him to obtain such an annulment while Yiftach felt that this would be an affront to his position as the “shofet” judge and temporal leader of Israel. So nothing was done, the vow remained, and the innocent life of Yiftach’s daughter was snuffed out on the altar of pride. So Pinchas is slightly tarnished in this story as well.

The eventual complete redemption of Pinchas occurs when the Talmud equates him with the prophet Eliyahu. It is therefore Pinchas/Eliyahu who accompanies the Jewish people throughout the ages and the troubles. He is present at every brit milah and at every Pesach seder. He is the harbinger of our complete redemption, the one who will bind the generations together and is the symbol of hope and the glorious future of Israel and humankind.

It is as Eliyahu that Pinchas receives the undisputed heroic stature that the Lord grants to him in this week’s parsha. May we see him speedily in our days.

Understanding Each Person's Uniqueness

by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen

Bamidbar, 27:15-16: Moses spoke to God saying, May HaShem, God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the assembly...

Bamidbar, 27:18: HaShem said to Moses, 'Take to yourself Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom there is spirit, and lean your hand upon him.'

Rashi, 27:16: sv. God of the spirits: For what [reason] was this said? He [Moshe] said before Him, Master of the Universe, it is revealed before you the nature of each person and that they are not similar to each other - appoint a leader who can bear each person according to his nature.

Rashi, 27:18, sv. In whom there is spirit: As you asked - that he can guide corresponding to the spirit of each person.

Moses, realizing that he will not lead the people into the land of Israel, asks God to appoint a successor. Within his request he describes God in an unusual way; as the 'God of the spirits of all flesh'. Rashi explains that he was alluding to God's ability to understand the different natures of every single individual, and he was requesting that his successor emulate this quality as much as possible. It is illuminating that of all the possible qualities required for leadership that Moses seemed to consider this in particular as the most important. It comes to teach us the importance of understanding the different natures of people, and the accompanying need to treat them differently. This trait is not only relevant to a leader of the Jewish nation - it is necessary for any person in a position of authority over others, including a teacher or parent.

With regard to how we bring up children, King Solomon teaches us this idea through his well known exhortation, "*Chanoch lenaar al pi darko*", (1) 'educate the child according to his way'. The wisest man teaches us that there is no single correct way of bringing up a child, rather one must understand each child's unique qualities and challenges and act accordingly.

There are many examples of this concept; below we will discuss one of the less well-known but vital applications, through a woman's personal account of a challenge she faced in her life. As a child, Rachel always found school very difficult, and it was apparent that she had some kind of learning disability but the experts were unable to detect what it was. She had one particular teacher who seemed to relate to her struggles more than the others, and gave her extra leeway. On one occasion the girl did very poorly in a test. Instead of berating her, the teacher gave her the opportunity to take the test again, but this time the teacher gave her significant help before the test. That evening, the girl worked very hard on the test and was happy to receive an 80% - not an outstanding result by any means, but given her natural challenges she felt redeemed. However, her teacher was not so satisfied: "Rachel, I understood why you did badly on the test the first time, but the second time I gave you so much help, you could easily have achieved a far higher grade than 80. When I was a child I also did badly in school until I realized that if I work harder I can do well; from then on I succeeded. If you would act the same way then you will do far better." This rebuke struck Rachel very hard, especially since she felt that she had genuinely worked hard. As she grew up she came to recognize that her teacher made a serious mistake. Up to that point she had empathized with Rachel because she had endured through similar difficulties as a child, but she assumed that Rachel's problems were the same as hers and consequently the solution would be identical as well. When this didn't happen she became angry at Rachel, thinking she was lazy, when in truth Rachel had totally different issues from her.

As she grew up and learnt to deal with her learning difficulties, Rachel felt a special affinity to children who had learning difficulties and she took a job as a teacher who's focus was on helping such children. There was one girl in the class who, like Rachel, didn't seem to follow what was going on, and would daydream throughout class. Rachel, relating to these problems, tried the very teaching techniques that had helped her as a child but to her chagrin they did not work. She felt herself getting frustrated at the child but soon realized that she was falling into the same trap as the teacher from her own childhood.

She approached the child therapist of the school with her difficulties with this child and how her techniques had failed to help. The therapist told her that there are two types of people who become teachers of children with learning difficulties; one group are those who always found learning easy and want to help those less fortunate than themselves; the other were people who struggled with those difficulties and wanted to help other children in similar situations. One benefit of the second group is that they could empathize with these children however there was also a danger - they expect that the child's problems are the same as theirs, and that the same solutions should work, when that often isn't the case. The therapist suggested different techniques to try with this girl.

This story teaches us a number of important lessons. Firstly we learn that we are prone to expect other people to function in a similar way as himself; this is natural because the only way we know how to view the world is our own. Yet when we are in a position of authority over other people, whether it be our own children, students, or employees, it is essential to avoid this trap and recognize that their strengths, challenges and outlook are likely to be very different to our own, and consequently the methods that may have worked for us may not succeed for others. In this way we can strive to somewhat emulate God's quality of relating to each individual in the way that will best bring out their potential.

“Pinchas the son of Elazar the son of Aharon the Kohen has turned My anger away from the Children of Israel by his zealously avenging Me among them, so that I did not destroy the children of Israel because of My zeal” (25:11)

Why does the Torah identify the father and grandfather of Pinchas a second time if they were already named at the end of the previous parsha? Rashi explains: The other tribes were insulting Pinchas, saying that it was out of line for the grandson of an idolater (Yisro, his mother's father) who fattened cows for idols to kill the leader of a tribe in Yisrael. As a rebuttal to this, the Torah identifies his lineage on his father's side to show that he did indeed have worthy ancestry. One lesson from this Rashi is that it is impossible to make everyone happy. Pinchas acted with great courage and succeeded in halting a terrible plague, but there were still people who were complaining about him. All we need to focus on is doing the right thing. Some people may not approve, but that is not something for us to be concerned about. Another lesson from this Rashi is that these scoffers from the other tribes were so focused on the negative. Instead of noting the impressive lineage that Pinchas had from his father's side, they wanted to make a big deal out of his mother's family. The Torah points out that they should have adjusted their perspective and looked for something positive. We should also try to notice positive things and ignore negative thoughts.

“And it shall be for him and his offspring after him a covenant of eternal priesthood, because he took zealous vengeance for his G-d, and he brought atonement for the Children of Israel” (25:13)

Pinchas performed one amazing act and he was given a reward for all of his future descendants, securing the privileges of being Kohanim for his family forever. People need to realize what they can accomplish for their children and grandchildren. We may hear people talk about putting money away for the next generation, but we can do so much for them on a spiritual level too. We might not see the impact in our own lifetimes, but our spiritual accomplishments can have a tremendous effect on our descendants many years from now. We should all endeavor to pass on a spiritual legacy to influence future generations.

“The daughters of Tzelafchad, son of Chefer, son of Gilad, son of Machir, son of Menashe, of the families of Menashe son of Yosef drew - and these are the names of his daughters: Machla, Noah, Chagla, Milka and Tirtza” (27:1)

What is the connection between the story of the daughters of Tzelafchad and the previous section which states that all the Jewish men died in the wilderness? The Midrash Rabba answers that the men died because they had cried upon hearing the report of the spies. Their love of Eretz Yisrael was lacking and they were upset by what they heard. The women had a much greater love for Eretz Yisrael and did not fall prey to the evil report of the spies. That is why only the men died in the wilderness. The contrast between the men and women is brought out by juxtaposing the death of the men to the desire of the daughters of Tzelafchad to receive a portion of land in Eretz Yisrael.

“And on the day of Shabbos, two unblemished lambs in the first year, and two tenths of an ephah of fine flour as a meal offering, mixed with oil, and its libation” (28:9)

Why don't we take out an additional Torah to read the section of the Korban Mussaf on Shabbos like we do on Yom Tov and Rosh Chodesh? Chizkuni answers that on those days, the special korban served as atonement, so we read the section from the Torah because that is considered as if we brought the korban and earned the atonement. However, the korban of Shabbos is different. It does not serve as atonement because the Shabbos day itself atones for a person's sins. When one experiences a proper Shabbos atmosphere, he becomes closer to Hashem and that itself serves as the atonement which one achieves on Shabbos. Therefore, there is no need to read the section from the Torah to get atonement. This is also why we do not wear tefillin on Shabbos. On weekdays, the tefillin serves as a sign of our connection with Hashem. But on Shabbos, the special atmosphere of the day emphasizes our connection with Hashem, so a separate sign of that connection is not necessary.

“The burnt offering of each Sabbath on its Sabbath, in addition to the continual burnt offering and its libation” (28:10)

Why does the Torah say that the Shabbos offering must be brought on Shabbos? When else would it be offered? Rashi says that if the offering of one Shabbos is forgotten, it cannot be brought on the following Shabbos to make up for what was missed. Once that particular Shabbos is over, the opportunity to bring its korban is forever lost. The lesson contained in this halacha is that we cannot let any Shabbos go by without taking something away from it. Just as a missed korban cannot be made up, a person cannot write off a Shabbos and say that he will have an amazing inspiring Shabbos the following week instead.. Every week, Shabbos gives us a fantastic opportunity for growth and each one is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. We must take advantage of every Shabbos and use the opportunity given to us to the fullest.

Tzelafchad's Daughters Were Motivated By The Land, Not The Money

By Rabbi Yissocher Frand

The daughters of Tzelafchad came to Moshe to ask for their deceased father's portion in the Land of Israel, since their father had died without sons to inherit his portion.

In tracing the lineage of the daughters of Tzelafchad, the Torah seems to provide redundant information. The pasuk says that they were “the daughters of Tzelafchad, son of Chefer, son of Gilead, son of Machir, son of Menashe” and then that they were “from the family of Menashe son of Yosef” [Bamidbar 27:1]. Why was it necessary to emphasize the fact that they descended from Menashe son of Yosef twice?

Rashi asks this question and answers that the emphasis indicates that love of Eretz Yisrael is genetic. Yosef loved the Land of Israel and insisted that his bones be returned there. This love for Eretz Yisrael ran in his family such that his descendants (Tzelafchad's daughters) insisted that they be given their fair portion in the Land.

The wife of the Sefas Emes asked her son (the Imrei Emes) a question on this Rashi: What is the proof that the daughters of Tzelafchad loved the Land of Israel? Perhaps they were just interested in their inheritance as a monetary matter. The Imrei Emes gave his mother a very good answer. There are two opinions regarding the identity of Tzelafchad. One opinion is that he was the chopper of wood [Bamidbar 15:32]. Another opinion is that he was from the group who tried to force their way into Canaan after the decree of the spies [Bamidbar 14:40]. Either way, Tzelafchad died in Parshas Shlach, prior to beginning of the decreed 40 years of wandering. His death occurred some 38 years prior to the events in Parshas Pinchas. If Tzelafchad's daughters were interested in their father's estate from a strictly financial perspective, why would they have waited 38 years to ask for it? Inheritance is not limited to land. What about his cattle? What about his other property? Apparently, they were not interested in that. It was only now, when they were on the doorstep of Eretz Yisrael that they came pressing their claim for inheritance of their father's portion. This is the demonstration of their love for the Land. They were silent regarding the cash and moveable property. However, their inheritance in the Land of Israel mattered greatly to them. They inherited this affinity to the Land from their great grandfather, Menashe son of Yosef.

The Shame and Disgrace of The Fact That “Yehoshua Was Like The Moon”

In this week's parsha, Yehoshua was designated as the heir to the position of leadership of the Jewish nation. He had the task and the privilege of leading Klal Yisrael into Eretz Yisrael.

Moshe was told “Take Yehoshua son of Nun... and place some of your majesty upon him so that the entire assembly of Israel will pay heed” [Bamidbar 27:18-20]. Rashi emphasizes that the instruction was to place SOME of your majesty – but not ALL of it upon him. Yehoshua bin Nun was not Moshe Rabbeinu.

The Talmud expresses this idea very sharply: “The elders of that generation bemoaned the fact that the face of Moshe resembled the sun (in its radiance), while the face of Yeshoshua (only) resembled the moon. Woe to us for the embarrassment; woe to us for the shame and disgrace.” [Bava Basra 75a]. (Yehoshua was also on a very high level, but he still could not be compared to Moshe.)

The sun is too bright to look at on a clear day, whereas we have no difficulty staring straight at the moon. The moon is not the sun. That was the difference between Moshe Rabbeinu and Yehoshua bin Nun. But why did the elders refer to it as a ‘disgrace’? What was the disgrace? The disgrace was that Moshe Rabbeinu was not the type of leader that comes along once in a lifetime. It is not true that every generation has a ‘Moshe Rabbeinu’. No! A leader and prophet like Moshe came along only one time in the history of the universe. No one was ever or will ever be his match.

The reason why Yehoshua merited leadership was not because he could match any of Moshe's attributes.

The Medrash [Bamidbar Rabbah 21] gives an analogy to explain how Yehoshua merited being Moshe's successor, based on the pasuk, “The protector of a fig tree will eat its fruit and the guardian of his master will be honored” [Mishlei 27:18]. Yehoshua succeeded Moshe because he was Moshe's talmid muvhak [prime disciple]. Yehoshua waited on Moshe hand and foot. He never departed from Moshe's tent. Our Sages speak of him spreading out the mats and the benches in Moshe Rabbeinu's study hall for people to sit on.

Our Sages are teaching us that if we cannot aspire to be a Moshe Rabbeinu, we can at least aspire to be dedicated servants to our superiors in the same sense that Yehoshua was dedicated to his master. The disgrace was the fact that there was only one Yehoshua bin Nun! There were certainly other people capable of cleaning up the Beis Medrash and turning the lights on and off as did Yehoshua. But although "somebody had to do it" only one person actually did it.

There are some people who we cannot aspire to become. They are too brilliant. But there are other people to whom we look up that we certainly can aspire to be like. Many people accomplish things that I may not accomplish, but I COULD accomplish if I really applied myself. It often does not take brains, it takes effort and time and determination. These are attributes that are within the reach of many of us.

The Elders realized that they too had the same attributes that Yehoshua had. They could have exerted themselves and had the same loyalty and faithfulness to Moshe as did Yehoshua. But they did not do so. As a result of this fact they now bemoaned, "Woe to us for our shame and disgrace. Woe to us that out of all Klal Yisrael only Yehoshua made this effort." "Moshe's face was like the sun and that is not always attainable. Not everyone can be a sun. But Yehoshua's face was like the moon. That certainly was attainable, had we made the effort. We should be ashamed for not having made that effort."

Separate But Unequal

By Sheldon Stern

A few weeks ago I was at the Safra Synagogue in Manhattan and heard a wonderful speech from Rabbi Ariel Mizrahi. He made the following point. At the end of Parshas Behaalochecha, Miriam was stricken with Tzaraas for speaking improperly about her younger brother. Most focus on her punishment, and Moshe's intercession on her behalf, but Rabbi Mizrahi had a different spin. He argued that Parshas Korach is juxtaposed with Behaalochecha because Miriam's negative speech emboldened the provocateur to rebel against our indomitable leader. There's a similar dynamic in this week's Parsha but with an important twist.

In the aftermath of the insurgency, the Torah relates that many railed against Moshe for killing "G-d's people". How do we understand this when we consider that Hashem gave the thumbs down to the rebels? Parshas Korach begins, "Vayikach Korach." The Gemara in Kiddushin teaches that we derive that a woman is acquired in marriage via a Gezeirah Shoveh Kicha, Kicha from Avraham's purchase of Efron's field. Hillel understands the Talmudic dictum of Keitzad Meraked Lifnei Hakallah as teaching that one should praise a bride no matter what he really thinks. Why so? Imagine your wife bought an expensive dress and you hated it. Having diplomatically determined that she can't/won't bring it back you tell her it's beautiful. That's the power of Kicha. Korach, in essence, bought his followers' allegiance. And when that happens people are loath to change their attitude, which would mean acknowledging that they were wrong. And that's why Shabbetai Tzvi's adherents excused away all his indiscretions even convincing themselves that his conversion to Islam was part of the Messianic process.

Now we come to Parshas Pinchas. Our eponymous character took matters into his own hands and by killing the perpetrators he stemmed the terrible plague that had claimed 24,000 lives. A simple thank you, at least, was called for but no. Instead, the Simeonites, taking their lead from the incident involving Korach, according to Rabbi Mizrahi's thesis, vented against our hero even denigrating him as the descendant of an idolater. So what's happening here? We're all familiar with the Midrash which states that when the Yidden fjorded the Yam Suf they walked through 12 separate channels. Rabbi Miller derives from this that diversity is a fundamental element of Judaism. This is correct, but there's another point to consider. While the Gentiles have always viewed us collectively as the accursed Jews, actually we were a twelve-tribe conglomerate, with each Shevet having its own identity and mores. Intermarriage between the Shevatim was extremely rare. Therefore, the nerve of this interloper from Shevet Levi to kill, or even approach, the leader of Shevet Shimon. When we're introduced to these two brothers in Sefer Breishis it's always Shimon, who was the elder, who came first. This was a point of honor that wasn't ceded even though the leader of Klal Yisroel was from the baby brother. It may seem silly, but to understand Biblical incidents they must be viewed through their and not our prism.

Let's present a contemporary example. When I was in the Parsha, Yichus was a big deal. BT's were frowned upon, and Gerim were told to go to the back of the bus when it came to Shidduchim. Today a new set of "essentials" hold sway. And this is what's meant by the line in Haazinu, "Binu Shnos Dor V'Dor. There are certain constants, jealousy, lust etc. but each generation has its own unique challenges and so the one size fits all approach does not work. Rather we must navigate whatever Hashem sends our way.