

Weekly Parsha :: PINCHAS

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The Torah traces the lineage of Pinchas back to his grandfather Aaron. At first glance, there are no more disparate characters that appear to us in the Torah's narrative. Aaron is gentle and kind, compromising and seeking peace between differing people and factions, noble in character and beloved by all of Israel. When Aaron passes from the world, the entire Jewish people without exception mourned his passing, and felt a great loss that his departure meant to them. Aaron was not only the first high priest of the Jewish people to serve in the tabernacle but was also the prototype for all later high priests that would occupy that position in future generations.

In contradistinction to this assessment of character and behavior, the Torah describes Pinchas as a zealot who takes violent action against those who publicly defame and destroy Torah values and the Jewish people. He rises to the occasion by killing one of the leaders of the tribes of Israel. He is criticized by the Jewish people for such behavior, and they attributed his conduct to his lineage. Pinchas was not only descended from Aaron but he also was descended from non-Jewish priests, and his violent characteristics are attributed to his non-Jewish grandfather. Yet, the Torah chooses to emphasize the priestly lineage of Pinchas and attribute his behavior and his response to the public defamation of God in Israel specifically to his grandfather Aaron.

There is a strong lesson being taught with this nuance of lineage that appears in this week's Torah reading. We will find later in Jewish history, at the time of the Greek persecution of the Jews and of Judaism, that another descendent of Aaron, Matityahu, together with his family, also kills a renegade who defames the God of Israel and the Jewish people publicly by sacrificing to idolatry. Here we again see that within the holy and gentle character of Aaron and the priestly clan of Israel, there resides an iron will to stand strong against the defamation of everything that is holy and eternal.

When the situation demands it, the gentle priest becomes a man of war, who can and must take decisive and even violent action, to preserve the integrity of Torah and Jewish life. The Torah is generally not in favor of zealotry. However, as in the case of Pinchas, and later Elijah, sometimes zealotry is not only acceptable but necessary for Jewish survival. The problem always is how can a person measure whether the situation calls for such zealotry and even violent behavior.

This eternal difficulty of life is presented to us. We can rarely be certain as to the correctness of our attitudes and behavior under a given situation or in response to a certain challenge. The Torah does not demand from us the wisdom of angels. But it does show us that there are different, even opposing responses, that are valid in difficult situations in both public and private life. The wise and holy person will be able to choose correctly.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

In My Opinion :: IMPLOSION

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

Even a cursory review of world history allows the reader to realize that great and mighty countries and empires fall not necessarily because of outside pressures, but because of the implosion of the society itself. Rome ruled the world for over five centuries, and, at the height of its power, it succumbed to barbaric tribes. The breakup and disintegration of the Empire came as Rome was undermined by the spread of Christianity within its society and the dissatisfaction and dissolution of social norms. These factors gave way to internal violence and a complete abandonment of any sense of loyalty to the Empire itself, or to the history that Rome had so carefully fashioned and preserved over its centuries of hegemony. In short, Rome collapsed from within and not from without.

The same can be said of the Spanish Empire in the 16th century, which never recovered from its foolish, and self-destructive exile of its Jewish population at the beginning of the century. It no longer possessed the creativity and will to succeed that had driven it to become one of the major powers in the world.

The Ottoman Empire was also rotten from the inside, and any stress placed upon it would hasten its extinction and disappearance. The first World War provided that stress, and the Ottoman Turkish Empire never recovered. In our time, we have witnessed the destruction of Communism within the Soviet Union after 75 years of brutal and tyrannical rule. Once again, the Soviet Union collapsed from the inside and not from the outside. It had weathered all of the storms of World War II and the Cold War, but it could not survive because of the malays of its population, the burdens of bureaucracy and inefficient government that it had foisted upon a helpless populace.

A serious question has now arisen regarding the future of the United States of America. It is a very polarized society, and over the past decades it has lost its moral footing. It has become dissolute, hateful of its own heritage, spoiled by too much material wealth, and subject to Marxist indoctrination emanating from its educational systems. Whether or not the United States will be able to survive this storm is, as of yet, an undecided question. However, it is clear to me that no matter what happens, it will become increasingly difficult for Orthodox Jews to maintain themselves in American society. The entire culture is hostile to Torah values and to a Jewish way of life.

Jews have waxed prosperous over the past decades, and the continuity of Orthodox educational institutions is contingent upon the continuation of that prosperity. However, whether America will have a prosperous future over the next few decades is a difficult question to answer. There will be more governmental regulations regarding curriculum, and the nature of educational classes in schools. Education separated by sex will certainly not be allowed, and the concentration on Torah studies will be severely limited. I hope that I am wrong regarding my fears, but my heart tells me otherwise.

Certainly, the America that I grew up in and lived in for most of my lifetime no longer exists. There is no longer wholesome entertainment nor a feeling of moral probity. America was once a religious country. Today it has become overwhelmingly secular with all the attendant evils that such a change in society inevitably engenders. History teaches us that nothing goes on forever, and that great countries and empires rise but inevitably fall.

For many years, I thought that the United States was an exception to that rule, but I no longer believe so. The curve has already flattened, and we are witness to the downward spiral that leads to irrelevance and impotence in world events, I fervently pray that I am wrong but these are my impressions as I view the current scene.

Shabbat Shalom

Berel Wein

Moral vs. Political Decisions (Pinchas 5780)

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

The coronavirus pandemic raised a series of deep moral and political issues.[1] How far should governments go in seeking to prevent its spread? To what extent should it restrict people's movements at the cost of violating their civil liberties? How far should it go in imposing a clampdown of businesses at the cost of driving many of them bankrupt, rendering swathes of the population unemployed, building up a mountain of debt for the future and plunging the economy into the worst recession since the 1930s? These are just a few of the many heart-breaking dilemmas that the pandemic forced on governments and on us. Strikingly, almost every country adopted the same measures: social distancing and lockdown until the incidence of new cases had reached its peak (Sweden was the most conspicuous exception). Nations didn't count the cost. Virtually unanimously, they placed the saving of life

above all other considerations. The economy may suffer, but life is infinitely precious and saving it takes precedence over all else.

This was a momentous victory for the value first articulated in the Torah in the Noahide covenant: "He who sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of God He created man" (Gen. 9:6). This was the first declaration of the principle that human life is sacred. As the Sages put it, "Every life is like a universe. Save a life and it is as if you have saved a universe." [2]

In the ancient world, economic considerations took precedence over life. Great building projects like the Tower of Babel and the Egyptian pyramids involved huge loss of life. Even in the 20th century, lives were sacrificed to economic ideology: between six and nine million under Stalin, and between 35 and 45 million under Chinese communism. The fact that virtually all nations, in the face of the pandemic, chose life was a significant victory for the Torah's ethic of the sanctity of life.

That said, the former Supreme Court judge Jonathan Sumption wrote a challenging article in which he argued that the world, or at least Britain, had got it wrong. [3] It was overreacting. The cure may be worse than the disease. The lockdown amounted to subjecting the population to house arrest, causing great distress and giving the police unprecedented and dangerous powers. It represented "an interference with our lives and our personal autonomy that is intolerable in a free society." The economic impact would be devastating. "If all this is the price of saving human life, we have to ask whether it is worth paying."

There are, he said, no absolute values in public policy. As proof he cited the fact that we allow cars, despite knowing that they are potentially lethal weapons, and that every year thousands of people will be killed or maimed by them. In public policy there are always multiple, conflicting considerations. There are no non-negotiable absolutes, not even the sanctity of life.

It was a powerful and challenging piece. Are we wrong to think that life is indeed sacred? Might we be placing too high a value on life, imposing a huge economic burden on future generations?

I am going to suggest, oddly enough, that there is a direct connection between this argument and the story of Pinchas. It is far from obvious, but it is fundamental. It lies in the difference – philosophical and halachic – between moral and political decisions. [4]

Recall the Pinchas story. The Israelites, having been saved by God from Bilam's curses, fell headlong into the trap he then set for them. They began consorting with Midianite women and were soon worshipping their gods. God's anger burned. He ordered the death of the people's leaders. A plague raged; 24,000 died. A leading Israelite, Zimri, brought a Midianite woman, Cozbi, and cohabited with her in full view of Moses and the people. It was the most brazen of acts. Pinchas took a spear and drove it through them both. They died, and the plague stopped.

Was Pinchas a hero or a murderer? On the one hand, he saved countless lives: no more people died because of the plague. On the other hand, he could not have been certain of that in advance. To any onlooker, he might have seemed simply a man of violence, caught up in the lawlessness of the moment. The parsha of Balak ends with this terrible ambiguity unresolved. Only in our parsha do we hear the answer. God says:

"Pinchas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the Priest, has turned back My anger from the Israelites by being zealous among them on My behalf, so that I did not wipe out the Israelite people in My zeal. Therefore say: I am making with him My covenant of peace." (Num. 25:11-12)

God declared Pinchas a hero. He had saved the Israelites from destruction, showed the zeal that counterbalanced the people's faithlessness, and as a reward, God made a personal covenant with him. Pinchas did a good deed.

Halachah, however, dramatically circumscribes his act in multiple ways. First, it rules that if Zimri had turned and killed Pinchas in self-defence, he would be declared innocent in a court of law. [5] Second, it rules that if Pinchas had killed Zimri and Cozbi just before or after they were engaged in cohabitation, he would have been guilty of murder. [6] Third, had Pinchas consulted a Bet Din and asked whether he was permitted to do what he was proposing to do, the answer would have been, No. [7]

This is one of the rare cases where we say Halachah ve-ein morin kein: "It is the law, but we do not make it known." And there are many other conditions and reservations. The Torah resolves the ambiguity but halachah reinstates it. Legally speaking, Pinchas was on very thin ice.

We can only understand this by way of a fundamental distinction between moral decisions and political decisions. Moral decisions are answers to the question, "What should I do?" Usually they are based on rules that may not be transgressed whatever the consequences. In Judaism, moral decisions are the province of halachah.

Political decisions are answers to the question, "What should we do?" where the "we" means the nation as a whole. They tend to involve several conflicting considerations, and there is rarely a clear-cut solution. Usually the decision will be based on an evaluation of the likely consequences. In Judaism this sphere is known as mishpat melech (the legal domain of the king), or hilchot medinah (public policy regulations). [8] Whereas halachah is timeless, public policy tends to be time-bound and situational ("a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build").

Were we in Pinchas' position, asking, "Should I kill Zimri and Cozbi?" the moral answer is an unequivocal No. They may deserve to die; the whole nation may be eyewitnesses to their sin; but you cannot execute a death sentence without a duly constituted court of law, a trial, evidence and a judicial verdict. Killing without due process is murder. That is why the Talmud rules Halachah ve-ein morin kein: if Pinchas had asked a Bet Din whether he were permitted to act as he intended, he would be told, No. Halachah is based on non-negotiable moral principle, and halachically you cannot commit murder even to save lives.

But Pinchas was not acting on moral principle. He was making a political decision. There were thousands dying. The political leader, Moses, was in a highly compromised position. How could he condemn others for consorting with Midianite women when he himself had a Midianite wife? Pinchas saw that there was no one leading. The danger was immense. God's anger, already intense, was about to explode. So he acted – not on moral principle but on political calculation, relying not on halachah but on what would later be known as mishpat melech. Better take two lives immediately, that would have been eventually sentenced to death by the court, to save thousands now. And he was right, as God later made clear.

Now we can see exactly what was ambiguous about Pinchas' act. He was a private individual. The question he would normally have asked was, "What shall I do?", to which the answer is a moral one. But he acted as if he were a political leader asking, "What shall we do?" and deciding, based on consequences, that this would save many lives. Essentially, he acted as if he were Moses. He saved the day and the people. But imagine what would happen anywhere if an ordinary member of the public usurped the role of Head of State. Had God not endorsed Pinchas' action, he would have had a very difficult time.

The difference between moral and political decisions becomes very clear when it comes to decisions of life and death. The moral rule is: saving life takes precedence over all other mitzvot except three: incest, idolatry and murder. If a group is surrounded by gangsters who say, "Hand over one of you, or we will kill you all," they must all be prepared to die rather than hand over one. [9] Life is sacred and must not be sacrificed, whatever the consequences. That is morality; that is halachah.

However, a king of Israel was permitted, with the consent of the Sanhedrin, to wage a (non-defensive) war, even though many would die as a result. [10] He was permitted to execute a non-judicial death sentence against individuals on public policy grounds (le-takken halam kefi mah she-ha-sha'ah tzerichah). [11] In politics, as opposed to morality, the sanctity of life is a high value but not the only one. What matters are consequences. A ruler or government must act in the long-term interests of the people. That is why, though some will die as a result, governments are now gradually easing the lockdown provisions once the rate of infection falls, to relieve distress, ease the economic burden, and restore suspended civil liberties.

We have moral duties as individuals, and we make political decisions as nations. The two are different. That is what the story of Pinchas is about.

It also explains the tension in governments during the pandemic. We have a moral commitment to the sanctity of life, but we also have a political commitment, not just to life but also to “liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”[12] What was beautiful about the global response to Covid-19 was that virtually every nation in the world put moral considerations ahead of political ones until the danger began to recede. I believe that there are moral and political decisions and they are different. But there is a great danger that the two may drift apart. Politics then becomes amoral, and eventually corrupt. That is why the institution of prophecy was born. Prophets hold politicians accountable to morality. When kings act for the long-term welfare of the nation, they are not criticised. When they act for their own benefit, they are.[13] Likewise when they undermine the people’s moral and spiritual integrity.[14] Salvation by zealot – the Pinchas case – is no solution. Politics must be as moral as possible if a nation is to flourish in the long run. Shabbat Shalom

Shabbat Shalom: Pinchas (Numbers 25:10-30:1)

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – “Moses said to the Lord, ‘May the Lord, the God who gives breath to all living things, appoint someone over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so that the Lord’s people will not be like sheep without a shepherd’” (Numbers 27:15-17)

Moses’s request is made immediately after God instructs him to climb Mount Abarim and take a glimpse of the Promised Land—after which “he will be gathered to his family-nation.”

God explains that Moses must now relinquish his leadership because he did not sanctify God when he struck the rock instead of speaking to it.

On what basis is Joshua chosen by God to be Moses’ successor? The Midrash (Tanhuma Pinhas 11) suggests that the most logical choice would have been the more intellectually gifted Phinehas or Eleazar the priest, or alternatively, the personal choice of Moses himself—his own sons (see Rashi on Num. 27:16). The Midrash explains the choice of Joshua by citing a biblical verse: “He who tends a fig tree will eat its fruit, and he who looks after his master will be honored. Let the one who watches over the fig tree get to eat of its fruits” (Prov. 27:18).

Joshua was the devoted servant who never left Moses’s tent (Ex. 33:11). He was such a faithful disciple that he was absent from the encampment during the sin of the golden calf because he remained all 40 days at the foot of Mount Sinai, waiting for Moses to come down from the mountain (Exodus 32:17).

But why was “devotion” the primary consideration for a successor to Moses? After all, the most unique Mosaic quality was his outstanding intellect, the fact that he was able to connect and cleave to the active intellect of the Divine (as it were) so that Moses’s Torah and God’s Torah would merge together as one. Moses was a “law-giver King,” a ruler whose precepts of compassionate righteousness and moral justice would rule Israel until the end of time. Why choose the outstanding caretaker, the best shamash, not the most praiseworthy jurist, the leading expert in analysis and halachic judgment? I would submit that, although we are rightly called the “people of the book,” and Jews throughout the ages have been proud of their intellectual accomplishments in Torah, in philosophy and in science (witness the large proportion of Jews who have won Nobel prizes), our Torah-Book is first and foremost meant to foster the well-being of the people; it is “for your own good”: “Its ways are pleasant ways, and all its paths are peace. It is a tree of life to those who embrace her; those who lay hold of her will be blessed” (Prov. 3: 17-18).

Our Talmud’s ultimate objective must be to create a perfect society which looks out for the welfare of each individual; hence Maimonides concludes his magnum opus, the Mishne Torah, with a description of the Messianic Age, the period of human fulfillment and redemption which is the purpose of our entire halachic system. And it is not by chance that the source of our Oral Law, according to the Midrash is within the contextual frame of the Divine characteristics, the God of love,

compassion, freely giving grace, long-suffering, great loving-kindness, and truth. We may be the people of the Book, but the objective of the Book is the welfare of the people—one might even add, “to the people, by the people (human input in the Oral Law) and for the people.”

The true fruit of the tree of Torah is the Jewish people, whom Torah has informed, nurtured and recreated for the past 4,000 years. One can become too involved with the tree, so that one forgets that its purpose is its fruits, so involved in the analysis and casuistry of the logic that one overlooks the human enhancement which is its truest aim.

Only one who watches over the tree and worries about preserving its fruits has the right to legislate for them.

That’s why Joshua is appointed just as Moses is reminded of his sin at the “waters of strife,” when he strikes the rock (which symbolizes the often hard and stiff-necked nation) rather than speaking to it the loving words of our Oral Law. That is why the most fundamental task facing Joshua must be to understand the various spiritual needs (ruah) of the people comprising the nation and suit his decisions (as much as possible) to their temperaments and requirements. He must sensitively nurture his people just like a shepherd nurtures his flock, not only leading from up-front but also personally “bringing them in and taking them out” whenever necessary. Joshua is a true leader, who proved himself by “nurturing” and tending to the needs of his rebbe and learned from his rebbe to be devoted to the needs of his nation.

Shabbat Shalom!

Pinchas: The Tamid Offering Performed at Sinai

Rav Kook Torah

“This is the regular daily burnt offering, like the one performed at Mount Sinai; an appeasing fragrance, a fire-offering to God.” (Num. 28:6)

- Why does the Torah stress the fact that the daily Tamid offering was performed at Mount Sinai?

- Why is this offering described as both an “appeasing fragrance” and a “fire offering”?

The ‘Fragrant’ Service of the Forefathers

Even before the Torah’s revelation, the Jewish people merited an extraordinary closeness to God. The Sages taught that Abraham kept the entire Torah, even before it was revealed at Mount Sinai. And his descendants learned from him, continuing his legacy of holy living.

If the Jewish people already adhered to the Torah’s precepts, what did the Torah’s revelation at Mount Sinai accomplish?

The sanctity of Israel before Sinai was not on a permanent basis. The Midrash uses an unusual term to describe the mitzvot performed by the Forefathers. It refers to their service as *reichanit* - fragrant. What does this mean?

Their holiness contained elements of nobility and beauty, a spiritual richness and individual greatness. But their spiritual path was not firmly grounded in the world of actions. It was of a transient nature, like a passing aromatic fragrance.

The Concrete Sanctity of Sinai

At Mount Sinai, the sacred fire was etched in our souls on a practical, tangible level. We accepted the commitment to keep the Torah in action and deed: “We will do and we will obey.” For this reason, the Torah emphasizes that the Tamid offering was performed at Mount Sinai. The daily offering epitomizes the constant, concrete sanctity that was engraved in the very essence of Israel at Sinai.

The two characterizations of the Tamid offering - as an “appeasing fragrance” and as a “fire-offering” - indicate that it combines both of these paths of holiness.

The daily offering retains the abstract beauty of the Forefathers’ individual spirituality. It still exudes an “appeasing fragrance” recalling the fragrant service of the Avot.

But the Tamid also corresponds to the day-to-day, concrete sanctity of Sinai. It was a “fire-offering.” Like fire, it acted upon and ignited the physical world, introducing light and holiness into the realm of action and deed.

Insights Parshas Pinchas

Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim/Talmudic University

Parshas Pinchas - Tammuz 5780

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig
Follow the Leader

Moshe spoke to Hashem saying, "May Hashem, God of the spirits of all mankind, appoint a man over the assembly who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall take them out and who shall bring them in..." (27:15-17)

This week's parsha includes a remarkable conversation between Moshe and Hashem about the succession plan for leadership of Bnei Yisroel after Moshe's demise. Initially, after seeing that the daughters of Tzelafchad prevail in their quest to inherit their father's share in Eretz Yisroel, Moshe is moved to ask Hashem if his children could succeed him as leader. However, Hashem informs Moshe that He has other intentions; namely, that Moshe's faithful servant Yehoshua be rewarded for his service (see Rashi 27:16).

Hashem then enjoins Moshe to "take to yourself Yehoshua son of Nun..." (27:18). Rashi (ad loc) explains that Hashem wanted Moshe to persuade Yehoshua by telling him how fortunate he was to get to lead the children of Hashem. Yet, a few verses later (27:22), when Moshe actually fulfills what Hashem had asked him to do - "Moshe did as Hashem commanded him. He took Yehoshua..." - Rashi (ad loc) comments that Moshe convinced Yehoshua by informing him of the great reward for the leaders of the Jewish people in the World to Come. Hashem had asked Moshe to tell Yehoshua how fortunate he was to be offered the ultimate leadership position of Hashem's children, yet Moshe basically talked to him about the retirement benefits. Why did Moshe change what Hashem had initially asked him to tell Yehoshua?

To begin to understand what transpired we must start by examining how Moshe described the kind of person necessary for his job. Moshe makes a specific request that Hashem appoint someone who "will go out in front of them and come in before them." Moshe then adds, "who shall take them out and who shall bring them in..." (27:17). This request seems a bit contradictory; does the leader go out in front of them and come in before them, or does he take them out and bring them in?

There is a very enigmatic statement in the Gemara (Kesuvos 105b) regarding leadership (it's one that haunts shul rabbis the world over), "Abaye said - this young rabbi who is beloved by the people of his town, it is not because they think he has such fine character, it is because he doesn't rebuke them in religious matters." Abaye's statement is very difficult to understand: If a rabbi is beloved, it's because he isn't doing his job. However, the converse seems just as bad: If he is doing his job (criticizing his constituency), he will be despised. Surely, a hated rabbi cannot be considered to be doing his job properly either!

The Torah is teaching us the fundamentals of leadership. Every leader has two roles; one is to lead by example, the other is to direct the people to do what needs to be done. The primary responsibility of a leader is to inspire the people to act in a certain way; i.e. a leader needs to be relatable and charismatic enough that the people will follow his lead. They need to look up to him, want to emulate him and his way of living, and buy into his goals in order to help fulfill his vision for the community.

But a leader also has an important, albeit secondary, role; to make sure his followers are doing what they are supposed to be doing, even when they don't want to do the right thing. This is a much harder task, as it must come from an outside force rather than an inner motivation. A leader is empowered to force his constituents to do the right thing, even when they don't want to.

Moshe's request from Hashem reflects these two roles; "he must lead them out and lead them in," but if they don't want to then he must "bring them out and bring them in." This also explains the two versions of what Moshe was to tell Yehoshua. Hashem was telling him to persuade Yehoshua by extolling the privilege of inspiring the children of Hashem through leadership. The word Rashi uses in that verse (27:18) is *l'hanhig*

- to lead. When Moshe tells Yehoshua he is referring to the less pleasant aspect of leadership - criticizing and forcing the people to do what they do want to do. Rashi in that verse (27:22) uses the word *parnes* - provider. The ultimate power behind a leader is that he is their provider; which is how he can force them to do the right thing. But this is very difficult and unpleasant to do, and as Moshe tells Yehoshua, "the reward for providers of the Jewish people is in the next world."

Just as Moshe made sure that Yehoshua would fully understand both roles of leadership, we must understand and apply these same principles to our own homes. A parent's leadership role is primarily to inspire his children to follow in the proper way to live. The children have to look at his example and feel like they want to emulate him. A key component of this is that the parent needs to be someone whom they want to emulate. Of course, a parent has to criticize and gently redirect his children when they make mistakes. But even then, the primary goal is to make sure the children understand he is doing it out of love for them, not because he wants to control them. In this way, they will choose to follow in his path long after they have left their parents' house.

A Will to Want Not

If a man will die and he has no son, you shall cause his inheritance to pass over to his daughter (27:8).

This week's parsha recounts the entire incident of the daughters of Tzelafchad who wished to inherit their father's portion in Eretz Yisroel, even though he predeceased the actual distribution of the land of Israel to the respective tribes. The issue lay in whether or not a daughter may inherit property from her father in a case where there are no sons.

The Sefer Hachinuch (Mitzvah 400), in his discussion of the laws of inheritance, rules that although the Torah ascribes directives in dealing with inheritance, there is no obligation for a parent to leave an inheritance for a child. This imperative is only found in regards to the nations of the world.

This seems a little difficult to understand; it is within every Jewish parent's nature to be concerned for his child's financial well-being, with special emphasis placed upon ensuring his child's security even after the parent's death. The Chinuch's ruling seems contrary to the innate character of the Jew. What could possibly be the Chinuch's reasoning?

A similar question can be asked on a ruling of the Talmud. The Gemara (Kesuvos 49b) states that a parent need only be concerned for the financial well-being of his child until the age of six. How can we possibly fathom a Jewish parent considering his child financially independent at the age of six?

The attribute of kindness defines a Jew's nature. Therefore, there is never any doubt that a Jewish parent will assume responsibility for his six-year-old child. Rather, the Torah is sending a profound message to the child to appreciate all that his parents are doing for him, for their financial assistance is done out of a sense of compassion, not obligation. Providing for your children is an expression of love, not a fulfillment of an obligation. Once a child begins to internalize his parents' motivation for supporting him, it will strengthen the child's love for his parents.

Standing on their Shoulders

The sons of Reuvein: of Chanoch, the family of the Chanochite... (26:5)
Prior to Bnei Yisroel entering Eretz Yisroel, Hashem commanded Moshe and Elazar to conduct a new census. To all the family names, the letter "hey" was added as a prefix and "yud" as a suffix. For example, the family of Chanoch was referred to as "HaChanochi." Rashi (ad loc) explains that those letters formed the name of Hashem. The reason for this change to their names is that the nations of the world mocked the purity of the Jewish lineage.

They pointed out that Bnei Yisroel tracing their genealogy according to the tribes of their father was a fantasy. They claimed that since the Egyptians had complete control of the Jewish males (who were slaves), surely they had violated the Jewish women; leading to many Jews being descendants of the Egyptians. Therefore, Hashem attached His name to the names of the Jewish families in order to attest to the purity of Jewish ancestry.

It is difficult to understand how adding two letters to Jewish families' names deflects the claims of the nations. The only possible answer is that Hashem had no intention of deflecting the claims of the nations. Rather, this was done to assuage the insecurities of Bnei Yisroel themselves. At this time, Bnei Yisroel were recovering from a plague that decimated a significant portion of the nation. This plague came as a punishment for their involvement in licentious behavior and acts of depravity while consorting with the daughters of Midian. These transgressions seem to indicate characteristics distinctly attributed to Egyptian nature and culture.

Consequently, these transgressions committed by Bnei Yisroel might have led some to give credence to the notion that the allegations of the nations of the world were indeed true. Therefore, Hashem lent His holy name to the Jewish families to reassure them that they were of pure lineage.

However, there is also a much deeper lesson to be learned here. We often ascribe our own failings to issues that are beyond our control, when in truth we must own our mistakes and work to improve ourselves. We tend to blame our parents or circumstances beyond our control for things that we ought to own as our responsibility. Hashem is lending His name to our lineage to tell us that our past is in His hands, but our present and future are in our own control.

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Ask Rav Aviner

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a day. Here's a sample:

Changing name of Donor on Object in Shul

Q: If someone donated a Torah cover to the Shul and it deteriorated over time, is it permissible for someone else to donate a new one and have his name on it?

A: Yes. Every donor clearly understands that an object will not last forever. This follows the opinion of Shut Shevet Ha-Levi (9:205) unlike Shut Igrot Moshe (Orach Chaim 2:26).

Son who Enters Har Ha-Bayit

Q: I just discovered that my son enters the Temple Mount without asking me. What should I do?

A: Love him.

People of the Book

Q: Is the expression "People of the Book" about the Jewish People correct?

A: No. This is an expression used in the Koran. We are the "People of Hashem".

Minhag of Baal Teshuvah

Q: Which Minhag should a Baal Teshuvah adopt?

A: He should follow his ancestors' Minhagim. If he desires, however, he can choose a different Minhag, such as his Rabbi's. Piskei Teshuvot 68:3 note #26.

Peyot

Q: Why do we need to have Peyot?

A: Holiness of one's face.

Honor during Torah Class

Q: It is permissible to go to the restroom in the middle of a Torah class?

A: No. One should go before or after. Prof. Nechama Leibowitz did not allow students to go out in the middle of a class, or come in late. She said: Would you act this way in a concert?!

Feeding Cats

Q: My science teacher told us that it is not good to feed the many street cats in Israel, because they kill all sorts of pests when they are hungry. Is this proper even if a cat is hungry at the moment?

A: Yes. The cats eat mice and snakes.

Pidyon Ha-Ben for Child who did not have a Brit Milah

Q: If parents refused to give their child a Brit Milah because of ideological reasons, should he still have a Pidyon Ha-Ben?

A: Yes. They are not connected to one another.

Miracle Stories

Q: Why do Sefardic Rabbis tell so many miracle stories about Rabbis and Ashkenazic Rabbis do not?

A: There are Ashkenazic Rabbis who do tell them, and Sefardic Rabbis who do not. But according to all opinions, this is not the essential matter, but rather one's greatness in Torah learning, in awe of Hashem and with proper character traits.

Detailed Mitzvot

Q: Why are there Mitzvot in the Torah which are not written with the details such as Shabbat and women covering their hair?

A: They are written in detail in the Torah to someone who is accustomed to reading the Torah in the proper way. Great Rabbis of the previous generation proved this in their commentaries: Revid Ha-Zahav, Mesech Chochmah, Netziv, Ha-Rav Shimshon Rafael Hirsch, Ha-Ketav Ve-Ha-Kabbalah and the Torah Temimah.

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For the week ending 11 July 2020 / 19 Tammuz 5780

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Parshat Pinchas

Know Your Enemy

"Harass the Midianites and smite them" (25:17)

I think I'm not alone in finding it difficult to maintain an appropriate weight for my height and my age. (In other words: "The Battle of the Bulge"). One of the techniques that seems to work is to "know your enemy." I remember once sitting in front of a beautiful and delicious piece of cake and saying to the cake, "Cake, I love you, but you hate me!"

Demonization — the stigmatizing of other's beliefs not in accord with one's own — is usually seen as an irrational defense, and is called upon only by those who are uncertain of the rightness of their own beliefs in the first place.

Take the case of the "battle cry" for example. A battle cry is a yell or chant taken up in battle to arouse aggression and esprit de corps on one's own side (and cause intimidation on the hostile side.) Often the battle cry is a way of submerging one's own lack of confidence. Now I doubt that the aforementioned piece of cake was much affrighted by my "battle cry" — but it worked to remind me that the beguiling fondant cream oozing from the cake was really half-an-hour on the treadmill. As the Italians say: "A moment on the lips — a lifetime on the hips."

But raise the stakes a bit, and things get to be more serious. Maybe instead of considering the challenge of merely a couple of (hundred) extra calories, consider instead the lure of big-time lust and immorality. What do you do to fight that?

"Harass the Midianites and smite them"

There are two commandments in this passage: The first is to view the Midianites as enemies — to demonize them — and then to concretize that perception by constantly harassing them. The word "harass" here is in the infinitive, to imply a constant state of mind rather than just a specific and tangible action. The lust for immoral pleasure, which is the very essence of Midian, can only be counteracted by a constant state of loathing. And that can come only by demonization. And that mindset results only from a constant internal battle cry.

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Parshas Pinchas: Waking Up to a New World

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

These days, we all find ourselves living in a new and different world. It was just this past Purim that we sat together in shul, next to one another, listening to the reading of Megilat Esther. We exchanged mishloach manot in close physical proximity to our friends, and the phrase "social distancing" was not part of our vocabulary. We felt secure economically

and were busy planning travel to distant places, especially Eretz Yisrael, for Pesach programs. Our calendars were filled with bar mitzvah celebrations and weddings.

How drastically has our world changed! Even as many communities have gradually "reopened," we now realize that things may never be quite the same as they were just a short time ago.

It is thus no wonder that I have lately found myself pondering the story of a man who lived not long before the fall of the first Beit HaMikdash, a man named Choni HaMaagal. Not only have I been pondering his story, but I have begun to identify with him.

The story is found in the Babylonian Talmud tractate Taanit. A slightly different version of the story is told in the Jerusalem Talmud, and a very different version appears in the writings of the historian Josephus.

As the Babylonian Talmud has it, Choni Hamaagal was a very pious man whose prayers were always answered. The nation turned to him to pray for rain in times of drought. One day, he passed a man planting a tree. He asked the man how long it would take for that tree to bear fruit. When the man responded that it would take many years, Choni asked, "Then why do you bother planting?" The man replied that he was not planting for himself but for his son, or perhaps even for his grandson, who would eventually enjoy the fruit.

Soon afterwards, Choni lay down to rest in a nearby cave. He fell into a deep sleep and awoke. He passed by the tree and, sure enough, there was a man there plucking fruit from the tree. It soon became apparent to Choni that the man enjoying the fruit was indeed the grandson of the man he had earlier encountered. He eventually discovered that he had been asleep for seventy years.

Choni returned to the local beit midrash, the study hall. He was accepted there because of his evident Torah scholarship. But gradually, Choni realized that he couldn't relate to this new generation. The world had changed, people had changed. He could find no friend, no person with whom he could share his thoughts and feelings. He exclaimed, "oh chavruta oh mituta, either companionship or death".

The notion of living out the rest of his years in a thoroughly changed social environment was so displeasing to Choni that death itself was preferable to him.

In this week's Torah portion, Parshat Pinchas (Numbers 25:10-30:1) we read that Moses, cognizant of his own imminent death, did not wish to leave his people leaderless. He thus beseeched the Almighty to designate his successor. Translated literally, his prayer reads: "May the Lord, God of the spirits for all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation who can go out before them and come in before them, so that the Lord's people not be like sheep without a shepherd." (ibid. 27:15-17)

The Lord appoints Joshua as Moses' successor. Moses "places his hands upon him," assenting to the Lord's choice.

This passage allows us a glimpse into the psyche of Moses. We learn, for example, that Moses made peace with his ultimate demise. We learn that he feels responsible for finding a competent successor. And we discover that he has no problem with the fact that it is his disciple who will one day fill his shoes.

I have recently been reading a fascinating book. It is written by Prof. Gerald J. Blidstein, of the University of Beersheba, and is entitled *Etzev Nebo*. The English title is more descriptive: *The Death of Moses: Readings in Midrash*.

The author displays a dazzling mastery of the entire Midrashic corpus. He demonstrates that the Midrash supplements the Torah's account of Moses' final days with a variety of intriguing alternative scenarios.

I carefully followed his analysis of those passages in the Midrash that insist that Moses did not easily surrender to his death, but instead protested to the Lord and begged to be granted, if not immortality, then at least a significant extension of his allotted time on earth. He even offered to live on in a subsidiary role, as a disciple of Joshua.

One Midrashic source, *Devarim Rabba* on Parshat Va'Etchanan, maintains that Moses was, in some mystical manner, granted his wish. The Midrash envisions the scene: "A heavenly voice, a bat kol, proclaimed, 'Study Torah under Joshua.' The people agreed... Joshua sat at the head, with Moses at his right and the sons of Aaron at his left, and

Joshua taught in Moses' presence. The Lord took the reins of wisdom from Moses and handed them over to Joshua. Moses did not understand a word of Joshua's lecture. Afterwards, the people asked Moses to review the lecture, and Moses was forced to admit that he knew not what to say and then collapsed. He said, 'Master of the Universe, until now I begged for life, but now I am ready to give my soul over into Your hands.'"

Reading this passage, I could not help but recall the story of Choni HaMaagal. The world changes from one generation to the next. As the older generation ages, it becomes increasingly aware that it has no place in the new world. It is outdated, almost irrelevant, out of touch with the challenges and resources of the new reality.

Choni was not the first to prefer death to the lack of companionship. Moses, at least according to one Midrashic approach, surrendered to every man's eventual fate only when he realized that he had no meaningful role to play in Joshua's new world.

As I reflect upon the story of Choni and the Midrash about Moses, two anecdotes come to mind.

One was related by the late Hasidic Rebbe of Klausenburger, Rabbi Yekutiel Yehuda Halberstam, a descendent of the famed nineteenth century halachic authority, Rabbi Chaim of Zanz. The Rebbe taught that his ancestor ceased to issue halachic rulings after he reached the age of seventy. This was not because he felt that his intellect was waning. Rather, he believed firmly that he was not, and could not be, sufficiently familiar with the realities faced by a new generation. He was thus unqualified to offer it authoritative halachic guidance.

Secondly, it was the late Rabbi Walter Wurzbürger who shared with me the last conversation he had with his mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik. Rabbi Soloveitchik told him that he struggled to be able to understand each new generation of his students sufficiently to adapt to their cultural backgrounds. He claimed that he was confronted with an entirely new generation of students every five years. For example, he decided to change the language in which he delivered his lectures from Yiddish to English. But, he lamented, "it was eventually no longer a matter of mere language. I began to feel that I had outlived my usefulness."

Today, old and young alike, we all face circumstances which will force us to doubt our ability to cope successfully, let alone live full and meaningful Jewish lives. We must not yield to these doubts. Instead, we must draw upon our own inner strengths and upon the vast creative resources that lie within the minds and souls of others.

We must strive with all our might to make the "new normal" a spiritually and materially "greater normal."

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Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message

"The Pain of Giving Reproof"

(Updated and revised from Parashat Pinchas 5761-2001)

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

On Thursday, July 9th, Jews the world over will observe the fast of Shivah Asar b'Tammuz, the Seventeenth day of Tammuz. The fast marks the day on the Hebrew calendar, in the year 586 B.C.E., when the Babylonian forces made its first breach in the walls of Jerusalem during the siege that ultimately led to the destruction of the Temple, on Tisha b'Av, the Ninth of Av.

The period between Shivah Asar b'Tammuz and Tisha b'Av is known as the "Three Weeks." During these three weeks, rejoicing is limited and the mourning period begins. The communal mourning becomes amplified during the nine days that precede Tisha b'av, and becomes most intense on the fast of Tisha b'Av, which this year will be observed from Wednesday night, July 29th through Thursday night, July 30th.

In order to create the appropriate mournful atmosphere in anticipation of the Temples' destruction, the sages ordained that the haftarat, the prophetic messages read on the three Shabbatot between the Seventeenth of Tammuz and the Ninth of Av, are prophecies that predict the destruction of the first Temple. These three haftarat that come from the

opening chapters of the books of Jeremiah and Isaiah are known as Shalosh d'Puranuta, the three prophecies of calamity. Each prophecy predicts the coming great destruction, and the punishments that would be visited upon the People of Israel due to their sinfulness.

The haftarah for parashat Pinchas consists of the entire first chapter of Jeremiah and continues through the first three verses of Jeremiah 2. The Book of Jeremiah opens with a description of G-d's selection of Jeremiah as a prophet. The youthful Jeremiah is reluctant to prophesy, claiming that he is unqualified because he is but a lad. G-d touches his mouth, and tells Jeremiah to have no fear, after all, G-d will put His words in to the prophet's mouth.

The first prophecy of Jeremiah concerns a vision of an almond-wood staff that G-d shows him. The second prophecy is a vision of a boiling caldron that is bubbling over from its northern side. G-d explains that the boiling caldron represents the evil that will burst forth from the north, symbolizing the Babylonian nation, who will emerge from the north, bringing great destruction in their wake.

While the meaning of the prophecy of the burning caldron is quite straightforward, the opening prophecy of the almond-wood staff is opaque and confounding. In Jeremiah 1:11, G-d asks the prophet, *מה ?* אַתָּה רֹאֵה ? *What do you see, Jeremiah?* The prophet responds, *מִקָּל שֵׁקֶד אֲנִי רֹאֵה*, "I see a staff made of almond-wood." Continuing his prophecy, Jeremiah says, (Jeremiah 1:12): *וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֵלַי*, G-d said to me, *הֲיִטְבֹּת לְרֵאוֹתַי כִּי שֵׁקֶד אֲנִי עַל דְּבָרִי לַעֲשׂוֹת*, "You have seen very well, for I will hasten to fulfill My word!"

The representational message of the almond-wood staff is clearly the message of "speed." Since the almond is the first tree to blossom in Israel, it symbolizes speed and alacrity—that G-d will hasten to bring the ominous fulfillment of His prophecy of destruction upon the Jewish people. (See the reference to almonds blossoming on Aaron's staff in Numbers 17:23).

But, the question remains, why does G-d say, *הֲיִטְבֹּת לְרֵאוֹתַי*, "Jeremiah you have seen very well," after all, what was so special about Jeremiah being able to identify an almond-wood staff?

May I suggest a possible explanation. A "staff"—*מִקָּל*—differs from a "branch" since it is a finished piece of wood. Once the wood is finished, sanded and planed, it is very difficult to distinguish between almond, pine or other varieties of wood. G-d therefore compliments Jeremiah, saying, *הֲיִטְבֹּת לְרֵאוֹתַי*, "You have seen very well." By being able to distinguish that the staff is specifically almond, you have enabled Me [G-d] to clarify my message of speed. This was no easy task. You, Jeremiah, are quite talented!

Good and well, but this raises another question, Why didn't G-d show Jeremiah an *עֵץ שֵׁקֶד*, an almond wood branch with leaves and bark? That would have made it much easier for Jeremiah to identify the wood's origin?

Perhaps, that is exactly the point. The message that Jeremiah will deliver to the people is a message of destruction and despair, a message of pain and suffering. Such a bitter message must be difficult for the prophet to deliver. G-d purposely made it difficult for the prophet to identify the almond-tree staff, to teach the prophet that delivering words of calamity must be difficult. As much as G-d needs to bring the punishment upon the Jewish people, He cannot do it with ease. Neither can the prophet who conveys G-d's message rejoice in being the messenger of G-d delivering the message of calamity. While Jeremiah is destined to be a prophet of doom, he may not be a joyful prophet of doom. Evil will eventually befall the people, but Jeremiah must share their pain. If he does not share their pain, then he is hardly a legitimate prophet.

For us, this is a most profound lesson of life. Whether the issues concern Jews or non-Jews, the land of Israel or other lands and other people in various parts of the world, the message of Israel prevailing over its enemies must be conveyed with care and consideration. Even when we speak of those who seemingly deserve to be punished, for the Jew, the message of suffering can never be a joyous message. Says the book of Proverbs—Mishlei (24:17), *אַל תִּשְׂמַח בְּאֹיְבֶיךָ*, When your enemy falters, do not rejoice. As much as we would like to rejoice, (and

perhaps, even deserve to rejoice), it is never proper to rejoice. It must be difficult for Jews to see even our most deserving enemies suffer.

This attitude of extreme sensitivity to the pain of others is an embodiment of the so-called "bottom line" of Judaism—the unqualified reverence for the sanctity of human life. It is for this same reason that G-d had to stop the ancient Israelites from singing the Hallel, the Songs of Praise of G-d, as the Egyptians drowned at the sea.

This sensitivity is our sacred tradition.

Fortunate are we to be the possessors of these remarkable traditions. The alternative, would be unthinkable.

May you be blessed.

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Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Dvar Torah: Pinchas

What is the hallmark of a great leader?

In Parashat Pinchas we find Moshe appealing to Hashem prior to his passing, to appoint his successor. This would be in order to guarantee a smooth transition of authority from one leader to the next. But what would the qualities of the next leader need to be? Moshe said to Hashem, please appoint a man, *אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא לִפְנֵיהֶם וְאֲשֶׁר יֵבֵא לִפְנֵיהֶם* – who will go out ahead of the people and come in ahead of the people ... *וְלֹא יִהְיֶה עִדְתָּהּ כַּצֹּאֵן אֲשֶׁר אֵין לָהֶם רֹעֵה* – in order that the assembly of the nation should not appear to be like sheep who have no shepherd".

Why did Moshe use this particular comparison? The Ktav Sofer explains beautifully – he says, often when a shepherd guides his sheep, he allows them to run ahead to pasture, while he remains at the back, with his staff in hand in order to keep the flock together. Therefore somebody looking at this flock might not notice the shepherd lagging behind – they might appear as sheep who have no shepherd.

Why is the shepherd doing this, asks the Ktav Sofer? He is doing it to protect himself. If a thief or a wild animal should attack, at least the shepherd would be able to flee for his own life.

Moshe was appealing to Hashem for the next leader to be visible, who would be there for their sake and not merely to protect his own position. Let the next leader be one who will go out ahead of the people always, in order to guarantee their successful future.

Ever since that time, our nation has been blessed with some truly outstanding leaders who have gone out ahead of the nation, who have been visible and who have been trailblazers. It is as a result of these courageous leaders of conviction that our nation has not appeared as sheep who have no shepherd.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.

Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Pinchas

Never Too Old to Improve

Still Looking to Improve at Age 120: Moshe's Mussar Method Modification

The narration at the beginning of Parshas Pinchas is really a culmination of the incident at the end of Parshas Balak where, in an act of religious zealotry, Pinchas executes the Prince of the Tribe of Shimon, together with a Midyanite Princess, when the two were engaged in an act of immorality. In this week's parsha, Moshe is commanded to take revenge against the Midyanites for their heinous act of having their daughters seduce the men of Israel into committing acts of idolatry and sexual immorality.

The truth of the matter is that the battle against Midyan does not occur in Parshas Pinchas. It occurs in Parshas Matos. There we have again the command from G-d to Moshe to take revenge against the Midyanites, and there the command is linked with Moshe's death: "... And afterwards you will be gathered to your nation." [Bamidbar 31:2]. In Matos, Moshe gathers an army of 12,000 men. They attack Midyan and kill out their kings. However, rather than killing out the women, the Jewish soldiers capture them and bring them back to Moshe Rabbeinu.

Moshe is not pleased. He became angry with the officers: "Have you kept the women alive?" [Bamidbar 31:15]. What is with you? The women were the cause of this whole tragedy, and now you are keeping them alive?

Then the pasuk says further "Elazar the Kohen said to the men of the army who came back from the battle, 'This is the decree of the Torah which Hashem commanded Moshe...'" [Bamidbar 31:21-24].

In addition to the women, the soldiers came back with much booty of war—the "vessels of Midyan." This is the only place where the Torah states the laws of kashering (purging absorbed non-kosher food from the vessels in which they were cooked). Interestingly, this parsha is not told to Bnei Yisrael by Moshe Rabbeinu, but rather by his nephew, Elazar.

Rashi explains: Since Moshe became angry here, he made a mistake. Even though he became angry for legitimate reasons (he was chastising them—how did they dare keep the women alive) nevertheless, once he lost his temper, he erred. Rashi cites several incidents throughout the Torah where Moshe became angry, and as a result, he forgot the halacha. One of the examples Rashi cites is the incident in Parshas Chukas, "Hear you, you rebellious people!" (when the people were complaining about lack of water). This incident caused Moshe to lose his opportunity to enter Eretz Yisrael. Again, once he became angry, he made a mistake (by hitting the rock rather than speaking to it, according to Rashi's interpretation there). For this reason, the parsha of the "Vessels of Midyan" was given through Elazar, rather than through Moshe.

Parshas Devorim begins with "These are the words that Moshe spoke to all of Israel in Transjordan, in the Midbar, in the Aravah, opposite the Sea of Reeds, between Paran and Tofel, and Lavan and Chatzeiros, and Di-Zahav." [Devorim 1:1] Rashi on this, the first pasuk in Sefer Devorim, paraphrasing the Sifrei, writes: Each one of the places mentioned in pinpointing the location of this address alludes to some type of subtle chastisement that Moshe Rabbeinu was giving the people. The Sifrei elaborates on the message of the various locations: In the "Midbar" – to remind them of how they made the Almighty angry in the Wilderness. "B'Aravah" – reminded them of how they sinned in Aravah with their worship of Baal Peor. "Mul Suf" refers to Yam Suf. "Bein Lavan u'bein Tofel" – refers to how they badmouthed the man, which was white (lavan). Virtually every word of this one pasuk alludes to chastisement.

I saw an interesting observation in a sefer called Maor v'Shemesh from Rav Klonimus Kalman haLevi Epstein. Chazal say that the word "Eleh" always excludes what had been mentioned previously. On the words "V'Eleh haMishpatim asher tasim lifneihem" [Shemos 21:1] Rashi points out that "Eleh" always excludes that which came prior.

The Maor v'Shemesh says that Moshe Rabbeinu "learned a lesson" (if we may use this terminology) over here. These are the last days of his life. Moshe said to himself, "I have made some mistakes in the past. One major mistake I made in the past was that I was too harsh with them. I have been too explicit with them in my criticism. I called them 'Morim' (you rebellious ones). [Bamidbar 20:10]" Now Moshe Rabbeinu decides he is going to take a different approach. He is going to give mussar, but he is going to do it subtly. "I will remind them of all the places they acted inappropriately, but I will do it derech remez (by hinting), because that is that way that mussar must be delivered.

There are two ways of giving mussar. When somebody does something wrong, you can say to him "How did you do that?" or you can say "How could you do that?" When the emphasis is on the word "that," the implication is that you have done a horrible thing. When the emphasis is on the word "you," the implication is that the act might not be so horrible, but a person of your great stature should not be doing it.

The famous Shaloh teaches a profound lesson on the pasuk in Mishlei "Al Tochach Letz pen Yisnaeka; hocheach l'chacham v'ye'ehavecha" [Mishlei 9:8] – (which on the surface means, do not give mussar to the cynic, for he will hate you, but give it to the wise person and he will love you). The Shaloh writes that this is not talking about two different people. It is the same person; however every person has a side of him that is a letz (a cynic) and a side of him that is a chochom (wise person). The Shaloh interprets the pasuk to be teaching that when giving mussar

to a person, appeal to the wise man within him—do not beat down the cynic within him.

That is what Moshe Rabbeinu is teaching us here. In the past, I have taken the approach of giving mussar to the "letz," as when I said "Hear ye you rebellious ones!" However, now, at the end of his life, Moshe Rabbeinu says, "I am going to change my approach. I am going to give mussar, but only in the most discreet of terms."

The truth of the matter is that giving mussar is not really something that we should do on a normal basis. As the Chazon Ish writes [Hilchos Shechita, end of Siman 2], we do not know how to give mussar nowadays. Unless a person is a Rav or in a position of authority (e.g., a teacher or a Rebbi), it is not for us to chastise our fellow man, because we really do not know how to do it.

However, in one area we must all give mussar. In this area, we are obligated to chastise. That area is in the raising of our children. The lesson of the Shaloh haKodosh is that there is a right way to give chastisement to our children and there is a wrong way. The wrong way is to chastise the "Letz" within them. Rather, appeal to the "Chochom" within them. As Mishlei teaches, "Chastise the wise and they will love you."

This is one lesson. The other lesson is that Moshe Rabbeinu is now 120 years old. He has been in this business for the last forty years. He did a very good job. Most people, who have been at something for forty years, with the success that Moshe Rabbeinu had in his career, think to themselves, "There is nothing more for me to learn about how to do this business." However, Moshe Rabbeinu, on the very last day of his life, is looking at himself and saying, "You know what? I made mistakes along the way. My mussar sometimes was too strong. I got angry. 'I lost my temper.' I am going to try a different approach."

The different approach is that the benign-sounding pasuk at the beginning of Sefer Devorim was his "mussar shmooz". At age 120, after doing this for forty years, Moshe Rabbeinu said, "Let us try something new." This is a lesson for all of us, no matter our age. I am a firm believer in the principle that a person is always in the child-raising business until he leaves this world, but even if we are not in the active child raising business anymore, we should all be in the business of learning how to improve our interpersonal skills. If Moshe Rabbeinu, at the end of his days, could introspect and say, "I have to change my approach", at least sometimes we need to look at ourselves and say, "I need to change my approach" as well.

Have a healthy summer!

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Kohen Forever :: Pinchas

Ben-Tzion Spitz

No love, no friendship can cross the path of our destiny without leaving some mark on it forever. - Francois Muriac

God has made a lot of promises to us. And when you read some of those promises, they sound quite nice. However, many of those promises are conditional. If we are good, then God will bless us with bounty, success, victory over our enemies, and more. When we don't fulfill our side of the deal, then God doesn't necessarily feel obliged to fulfill His side.

For example, we are told by the Talmud (Tractate Berachot 4a) that our patriarch Jacob was worried that perhaps some sin of his may have reduced not just his reward, but even the divine protection God had promised him. Jacob, it seems, understood that God's promise to him had been conditional.

However, there are a handful of promises that are unconditional. This week's reading of Pinchas has one such promise.

At the end of last week's reading, we are told of the mass promiscuity that men of Israel embarked on with the seductive women of Moab and Midian. At the height of the illegal dalliance, a prince of one of the

tribes of Israel is publicly intimate with a princess from Midian. Moses and the elders are horrified and seemingly paralyzed into inaction, but Pinhas, the grandson of Aaron, takes a spear and skewers the couple during their romantic act. Pinhas' violent, vigilante execution is credited with stopping the plague which had killed 24,000 men of Israel because of God's wrath over the widespread immorality.

As a reward for his daring, decisive act, which demonstrated Pinhas' love, obedience, and allegiance to God, God promises him an everlasting covenant of peace. The covenant installs Pinhas and all his descendants as Kohens, as the priests consecrated and dedicated to the service of God in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple.

The Meshech Chochma on Numbers 25:11 explains that this is an eternal, unconditional promise. It doesn't matter if a future Kohen misbehaves, he will always retain the status of a Kohen, with all of the ensuing rights and responsibilities of a Kohen.

He underlines that whenever God makes an absolute promise through His prophet, the promise cannot be revoked by any sin. He brings as further proof that there were descendants of Pinhas, who though they were the opposite of shining examples of morality, merited to serve as High Priests during the era of the second Temple.

May we merit to see both conditional and unconditional blessings, speedily and in our days.

Dedication - To the Kohens who are studying the laws of their Temple service.

Shabbat Shalom

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Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

Psalm from within the Earth! - Pinchas 5780

In this week's Torah portion of Pinchas, we read a long perek (chapter) that summarizes the census that took place in the Moab plain on the western side of the Jordan. This census was part of the nation's preparation for dividing the land among the tribes of Israel. During the census, we find a surprising reference to an event we read about weeks ago: the rebellion of Korach against Moses.

The Torah describes the census as the tribes of Israel were divided into households, and when it summarizes the families of the tribe of Ruben, it focuses on two familiar people – Datan and Aviram, Korach's partners in the rebellion against Moses:

“The sons of Eliab were Nemuel, Datan and Aviram they are Datan and Aviram, the chosen of the congregation who incited against Moses and Aaron in the assembly of Korach, when they incited against the Lord. And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and Korach...and they became a sign.”

And then there's an additional comment we will examine:

“Korach's sons, however, did not die.” (Numbers 26, 9 – 11)

What is the story with Korach's sons? When we read Parashat Korach we were given the impression that the entire Korach family was swallowed by the earth. Now, it turns out that impression was mistaken. Korach's sons did not die.

The next time we encounter Korach's sons will be in the book of Psalms. It turns out that Korach's sons were among the poets of the Psalms, and they even served as head poets in the Temple in Jerusalem. Eleven of the psalms were composed by the sons of Korach. Let's look at some of the verses of these psalms:

As a hart cries longingly for rivulets of water, so does my soul cry longingly to You, O G-d.

My soul thirsts for G-d, for the living G-d; when will I come and appear before G-d?

Why are you downcast, my soul, and why do you stir within me? Hope to G-d, for I will yet thank Him for the salvations of His presence. Psalms 42, 2-3; 12)

My soul yearns, yea, it pines for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh pray fervently to the living G-d.

O Lord of Hosts, fortunate is the man who trusts in You. (Ibid 84, 3; 13)

Korach's sons' psalms raise questions. These are lofty people experiencing profound religious experiences, connected down to the depths of their souls to what is sacred and to closeness with G-d. No wonder they merited being among the poets of the Psalms.

In order to understand their story correctly, we turn to Rashi, the biblical commentator:

“At first, they were in their father's counsel, but at the time of the controversy, they parted, and when all those around them were swallowed up, and the earth opened its mouth, their place was left within the mouth of the earth...There they uttered a song, and there they composed these psalms. Then they ascended from there, and the holy spirit rested on them.” (Rashi on Psalms 42, 1)

The sons of Korach, it turns out, were not always such righteous men. At the beginning of the rebellion, they sided with their father against Moses and Aaron. But at a certain point, they stopped and looked at where they were heading. When their father, Korach, was swallowed up by the earth, they descended as well! From the depths of the earth they acknowledged the error in their ways and made the decision to withdraw from the rebellion. At the last minute, they ascended from the earth and stayed alive!

Korach's sons symbolize man's incredible, G-d-given ability to rise up from low spiritual situations and embark on a new path that ultimately leads to the Divine Presence.

The poets of the Temple, the Torah tells us, were Korach's descendants. The prophet Samuel was a descendant of Korach's as well. Korach's family was not rejected following the acts of the head of the family because the right to renounce wrongdoing, rise up and move forward is not dependent on the acts of parents or on the acts of the person himself. Irrespective of a person's situation, he or she is called upon to rise up and move forward in a beneficial and joyful spiritual path.

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Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Pinchas

פרשת פינחס תש"פ

ובני קרח לא מתו

But the sons of Korach did not die. (26:11)

It is not as if Korach had protected his sons by excluding them from his ill-fated debacle. *Rashi* comments that they had been involved from the very beginning. At the time of the dispute, however, they were *meharher bi'teshuvah*, had thoughts of repentance in their hearts. Therefore, a place was fortified for them in *Gehinnom*, Purgatory, and they resided there. This means that the earth beneath them hardened above the spot designated for them in *Gehinnom*. Thus, they were spared due to the *teshuvah* thoughts they harbored. This is a powerful and inspiring lesson. *Teshuvah* saves.

When the *Ponovezher Rav*, *zl*, was about to travel on a fundraising trip, he visited his revered *Rebbe*, the *Chafetz Chaim*, *zl*, to receive his blessing. “Does the *Rebbe* have a message for the people in Europe?” he asked. “Tell them that it is quite simple to do *teshuvah*, repent. All one has to do is regret and express remorse over his deviation from Hashem's Torah. He then accepts upon himself to continue upon the prescribed path. The *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, would like us to think that *teshuvah* is a difficult undertaking which usually concludes in failure. This is one of the wiles of the *yetzer hora*. *Teshuvah* is not difficult.”

The Bnei Brak security guard who worked the protective unit that safeguarded Ponovezh *Yeshivah* was himself not observant. Thus, it came as a total surprise, when one day he appeared at his post sporting a *yarmulke* and wearing *tzitzis*. One of the *rabbanim* who met him asked, “My friend, what prompted you to wear *bigdei malchus*, royal garb?” The man replied, “It was the *shiur*, lecture, delivered by *Maran Horav Shach* (the *Rosh Yeshivah*).” The *Rav* countered, “What did you understand from the *shiur* that inspired you?”

“I did not understand a single word,” the guard replied. “When the car transporting the *Rosh Yeshivah* to the *yeshivah* pulled up, however, I

saw how the students reverently lifted the aged *Rosh Yeshivah* from the car, and how they supported every step that he slowly took until he ascended to the lectern. When I saw this, I thought to myself, ‘The *bais hamedrash* is filled to capacity, standing room only. What can this elderly *Rosh Yeshivah* say that is so special?’ I decided to stand by the door of the room and listen. As soon as the *Rosh Yeshivah* began the *shiur*, a complete transformation occurred. The *Rosh Yeshivah*, who was weak and unable to walk, delivered a lecture like a young, spirited eighteen-year-old. His passion and spirited delivery blew my mind! Where did he suddenly garner the strength to be so young and exuberant? I figured that it must come from the Torah. I decided then and there that, if Torah can create such a metamorphosis in a person, I was going to change my way of life and become observant.”

We have no shortage of *teshuvah* stories, because many people find their way back, often (like the *Bnei Korach*) through the vehicle of a *hirhur*, thought. (I looked up ‘thought’ in the thesaurus and arrived at a better word: consideration.) Many of us have fleeting thoughts, but never stop long enough to consider their import and impact. “Consider” the following story, which I just read in Rabbi Yechiel Spero’s, “One Small Spark.”

Many *yeshivos* in *Eretz Yisrael* cater to the needs – both physical and spiritual – of men who are returning to Jewish observance. One such *yeshivah*, under the leadership of *Horav Eliyahu* Feivelson, focuses primarily on the younger generation, men who seek to concretize their religious beliefs and their knowledge of Torah before going on to build a family. Thus, *Rav* Feivelson was surprised one day when a gentleman, regal in dress and demeanor, visited him with an unusual request: “I am a professor at the university and recently became a *baal teshuvah*. I am well on the road to becoming a fully observant member of *Am Yisrael*. My issue is with my wife. She is not yet there. In fact, she neither has interest in becoming *frum*, observant, nor in my carrying out my choice. She would much rather that I return to the ‘normal’ way of life that we enjoyed before I became *frum*. I came here to ask the Rabbi to please speak with my wife and attempt to convince her to accompany me on this journey.”

Rav Feivelson was impressed with this man’s request. It was not every day that an accomplished senior citizen showed up at his door to make such a request. “What motivated your return to Torah Judaism?” he asked the professor. This is his moving story.

“I was nine years old when my parents emigrated to *Eretz Yisrael*, following World War II. They were survivors who had lost everything in the Holocaust. Family, money, religion – all lost. They sought a better future for their *ben yachid*, only child. We arrived in a growing city that did not yet have the type of school that my mother wanted for me. Not knowing much about schools, she contacted her brother for advice. He suggested *Batei Avos*, which was a fine school, part of a religious orphanage located in Bnei Brak. The school had been established by the *Ponovezher Rav*, as part of his legacy to rebuild the Torah that was decimated in Europe. My mother trusted her brother. She had no reason to ask whether the school was religious. If she had known that it was, I would not have attended. Her child would not fall prey to the ‘mistake’ that had cost them everything. (Sadly, whenever something goes wrong, it is always G-d’s fault. We cannot judge. What the survivors experienced is beyond anything that we can describe or understand.)

Ashdod to Bnei Brak was not a commonly traveled route. When my mother sent me off, we knew that it would be some time before we would see one another. I would have a room and three solid meals a day, so why should she worry? One day, when my mother had to be in Bnei Brak for another reason, she decided to visit me in the school. How shocked and dismayed she was to discover that her precious child was attending a *frum* school. She was adamant: ‘Pack your bags; we are leaving this place. My child will not attend a religious school!’

“Three days later, an elderly man wearing a long black frock, sporting a white beard, appeared at our door. He introduced himself as *Rav* Kahaneman, the *Ponovezher Rav*. Apparently, he had been traveling outside the country on one of his fundraising trips and was dismayed to discover upon his return that one of his students had opted to leave.

‘What can I do,’ he asked, “to resolve the situation? Why did you take him home? Did we do something wrong? Was it the food, or his bed? What can we do to rectify this, so that he can return forthwith?”

“‘Nothing! Absolutely nothing! After what my husband and I experienced, we want nothing to do with religion. I was unaware that your school was religious. Otherwise, he would never have stepped foot in your building.’

“The *Rosh Yeshivah* begged. He pleaded. He promised the world. My mother, however, was adamant. There was no way I was returning to *Batei Avos*. Suddenly, the *Rav*’s knees began to shake, and he asked for a chair. He sat down by the table and began to cry uncontrollably. He uttered not a word; he just cried and cried. Ten minutes elapsed. He stopped, wiped his tears, rose from the chair and left our home.

“Indeed, my mother saw to it that her precious child would not grow up religious. I, however, never forgot that image before my eyes. The sight of an elderly *Rosh Yeshivah* weeping copiously over the loss of one young child to Judaism was forever etched in my psyche. His tears were so genuine, because his love of Torah and every Jewish *neshamah* was heartfelt and authentic. Many decades passed since that day, but I have finally returned. Now, I want my wife to join me, so that we can live out our twilight years as fully-observant Jews.”

Rav Feivelson agreed to help. After such a story, who could demur such a request? The *Rosh Yeshivah*’s cries never ceased. They pierced the heart of a young boy and remained with him throughout his life, until they finally had the desired effect.

קח לך את יהושע בן נון איש אשר רוח בו ... ונתתה מהודך עליו למען ישמעו כל עדת בני ישראל

Take to yourself Yehoshua ben Nun, a man in whom there is spirit... You shall place some of your splendor upon him, so that the entire assembly of Bnei Yisrael will pay heed. (27:18,20)

Targum Onkelos comments, *B’dil di yikablum minei kol k’nishta divnei Yisrael*; “So that the entire congregation of *Bnei Yisrael* will accept him.” *Rashi* writes, “So that they treat him with respect and fear, in the manner that they treat you.” It is wonderful to have *Moshe Rabbeinu*’s approval, but is it not superfluous? Once Hashem gave the order, “Take to yourself Yehoshua,” what else was necessary to segue to Yehoshua becoming *Moshe*’s successor? Is Hashem’s approval insufficient that it was necessary for the people to see that *Moshe*, too, was on board with this choice? Why did *Moshe* have to make *semichah*, lean his hands on him, to demonstrate to the nation that Yehoshua had his full support?

Horav Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal, *zl*, explains this practically. He begins by relating an incident that occurred concerning *Horav Shlomo Kluger*, *zl* (*Maharshak*), *Av Bais Din* and *Maggid* in Brody, Galicia. He was a prolific author who wrote 160 volumes (of which 115 were sizable) of commentary on all areas of Torah. Following his father’s death, he had grown up as a homeless orphan. The *Maggid*, *zl*, of Dubno met the boy wandering the streets of Zamosc, Poland, and took him in, arranging for *rebbeim* to tutor the young prodigy. He sat on a number of *batei din* (at age 22), together with more seasoned scholars, finally assuming a *rabbanus* in Kelokow, Galicia, at age 36.

Rav Shlomo was the paragon of integrity, a man who was unwilling to bend or compromise *halachah* out of fear of a litigant’s power, social or economic standing. This attitude (which is the only attitude a *rav* should adopt) led to his early departure from this *rabbanus*. In those days, *rosh hakahal*, head of the community/president, was a very powerful position. Indeed, some rabbinic leaders would acquiesce to the demands of their *rosh ha’kahal*. He was usually a distinguished, powerful leader who was extremely wealthy and well-connected. The average member of the Jewish community would act submissively in the presence of the *rosh hakahal*. *Rav* Shlomo did not. In fact, when a *din Torah* between the *rosh ha’kahal* and a member of the community presented itself before him, he rendered judgment according to *halachah* as he saw it. Sadly for him, in one instance, it found the *rosh hakahal* liable to pay a hefty sum of money.

It did not take long before the *rosh hakahal* made the *Rav*’s life miserable. As a result, poverty reigned in *Rav* Shlomo’s home. Every avenue of income was closed before him, because the *rosh ha’kahal*

controlled the community. He could no longer afford the type of clothes worn by the *rav* of a community. His old ones were torn, and he suffered the final indignity on *Shabbos* when he sat down on his seat up front and felt moisture beneath him. He stood up to see that “someone” had put filthy grease, generally used for the wheels of a carriage, on his seat. It ruined the rabbinic garb that he was wearing. Between the worn-out material, the holes and the grease, *Rav Shlomo Kluger* looked like an itinerant vagabond, which is what he had become. The *rosh hakahal* had won the first salvo.

Everyone eventually answers for whatever injustice he causes, especially if he denigrates a Torah scholar, because then he is disagreeing with Hashem and His Torah. Nonetheless, the man’s ultimate punishment would neither put food on *Rav Shlomo’s* table, nor would it give him some presentable garments. He packed his bag and left town. He planned to seek a tutoring position teaching children. The rabbinate was not for him. His deferential, unpretentious temperament precluded him from assuming a rabbinic position (or so he felt). He could hardly go on an interview in torn, foul-smelling clothing.

As he was traveling, he chanced upon *Horav Yosef Stern, zl, Rav of Zalkova*, one of that generation’s premier Torah giants, who immediately recognized the young *Rav* of Kelokow. He remarked, “How does someone of your stature go out in public in such attire? Where is your *kavod haTorah*, honor for the Torah?” (As a distinguished *Rav*, *Rav Shlomo Kluger* represented Torah at its apex. He could not present himself publicly in such a degrading manner.) After *Rav Shlomo* poured out his heart to *Rav Yozpa*, the *Rav* suggested traveling to Brody, where *Horav Efraim Zalman Margolis, zl*, lived. (*R’ Efraim Zalman* was a successful businessman who was also Brody’s leading Torah scholar. He had authored the *Matei Efraim* and *Shaarei Efraim*.) He had two sons who required tutoring. *Rav Shlomo* thanked the *Rav* and asked for a letter of approbation, since he did not know *Rav Efraim Zalman*. He was certain that without some kind of letter attesting to his erudition and character, he would be hard pressed to land a job.

Rav Shlomo continued his journey toward Brody, where he met *Rav Efraim Zalman*. His home was palatial, which added to the *Rav’s* discomfort, standing there in his filthy, torn clothing. *Rav Efraim Zalman’s* impeccable character refinement matched his brilliance in Torah knowledge. When *Rav Shlomo* related to him that he was seeking a position as a children’s tutor, *Rav Efraim* demurred, “You are far over-qualified for that. The city of Brody needs a *Maggid*, preacher, and *Av Bais Din*, head of its rabbinical court. I think that you are a perfect fit,” *Rav Efraim* said, “but first, we must obtain new clothes worthy of a distinguished *Rav*.” *Rav Efraim* barred *Rav Shlomo* from leaving his home for three days until the clothes were ready. If anyone were to see him in his shabby, foul-smelling clothes, all bets would be off. He would never get a job.

The next stop was the home of *Horav Meir Teumim, zl, Rav of Brody*, so that the *Rav* could converse with *Rav Shlomo* in learning and get a sense of what kind of peerless *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, he was. After the *Rav* was favorably impressed with the young *Rav’s* brilliance and unsurpassed erudition, it was time to visit Brody’s *rosh ha’kahal*. Obviously, a city of 25,000 Jews, which was home to many scholars, had a unique *rosh ha’kahal*. He was an individual who was not just wealthy and well-connected, but who was also an individual who knew his way around *Shas*, all of *Talmud Bavli*, and was comfortable in *Shulchan Aruch*, code of Jewish Law. He was a man who enjoyed his share of *kavod*, honor, and, due to his position, came to expect it. This time, *Rav Shlomo* had to be convinced that the man was actually erudite. *Rav Shlomo* felt that it was below the dignity of a *talmid chacham* to cower before an *am ha’aretz*, an illiterate person. He felt that the man’s money and power did not empower him with a level of dignity such that the Torah embodied within a *talmid chacham* should be denigrated for him. *Rav Efraim Zalman* explained that while he was absolutely justified in his feeling, the man was a scholar. If he wanted the position, he would have to accept the *rosh ha’kahal*.

All went well until the first *Shabbos*, when it was announced throughout the community that the new young *Av Bais Din* and *Maggid* would

address the congregation during *davening*. That *Shabbos*, the *shul* was packed, standing room only. When *Rav Shlomo* ascended the podium, he took one look at the crowd and nearly passed out. He had never seen so many people, let alone delivered a lecture to them. He began to speak, and his anxiety took over to the point that the words that he emitted from his mouth were foreign to everyone – even to him! *Rav Efraim* understood what was happening, and he immediately exclaimed, “Fantastic, *gevaldig!* Brilliant! What an incredible thought!” Nu, when *Rav Efraim* spoke, the *shul* listened. They, too, “convinced” themselves that the gibberish they were hearing was brilliant dialectic from a young master. This caused *Rav Shlomo* to calm down and speak eloquently for the next four hours, during which he held the congregation spellbound.

The question is obvious: Why did *Rav Efraim Zalman* focus so much on the externals, i.e. clothing, oration, presentation? Was his approbation not enough to garner support for his candidate? *Rav Teichtal* explains that, “No, it was not enough, because people expect a *Rav* to present himself to be authoritative, impressive, and commanding obedience and respect. If the powerful people who expect everyone to defer to them do not respect the *Rav*, do not expect that he can be a people’s *talmid chacham*, an unparalleled *posek*, an individual who can engage young people and reach them, then he will not be successful. It is all about authority. While it is true that one must be able to appreciate greatness, something which is beyond the average boor, one must know whom he is expected to impress before he begins the interview. Even *Yehoshua* needed *Moshe Rabbeinu* with him.

... וביום השבת שני כבשים בני שנה תמימים ...

And on the *Shabbos* day: two male lambs in their first year, unblemished. (28:9)

Shabbos bears testimony that Hashem created Heaven and earth. Hashem imbued this day with unique spiritual character, distinguishing it from the other six days of the week, elevating it to a higher level of sanctity. Thus, on *Shabbos* when the *Bais HaMikdash* was extant, we could offer a *Korban Mussaf*, Additional Offering, similar to what is offered on Festivals and holy days. The *Sefer HaChinuch* explains that when we bring an offering, we fix our thoughts on the significance of the day and its broad degree of sanctity. Man is impacted by his actions. Thus, Hashem commanded us to perform specific actions for the sake of the day, which, in turn, will imbue us with its sacredness. In short, a *korban* reminds us that this day – i.e. *Shabbos*, *Rosh Chodesh*, *Yomim Tovim* – is spiritually unique.

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, (*Mitzvos B’Simchah*) relates an inspiring *d’rash*, homiletic exposition, from *Horav Yaakov Yosef Herman, zl*, with regard to *Shabbos*. In the *Hoshanos* recited on *Shabbos Chol Hamoed Succos*, we laud *Klal Yisrael* for their devotion to *Shabbos Kodesh*. We recite a number of accolades, one of which at first appears ambiguous and somewhat less than laudatory: *Yosheves u’mantenes ad k’los ha’Shabbos*; “Who sit patiently on, before the end of *Shabbos*.” At first glance, this phrase implies that we are waiting for *Shabbos* to end, sort of looking at our watch every moment to see if we can perform a weekday activity. *Rav Herman* gave meaning to this verse via an incident that occurred personally concerning him.

Rav Herman’s daughter lay critically ill in the hospital. It was *Erev Shabbos*, and her parents had to make the painful decision: to leave her alone in the hospital for *Shabbos*, or stay with her and ignore the many guests that lined up by their door for the *Shabbos* meals. These were people who had nowhere to go, nothing to eat. These were people whose spiritual uplift for the entire week was derived from their *Shabbos* with the *Hermans*. *Rav Herman* decided that he must attend to the needs of these people. *Hashem Yisborach* would attend to his daughter. The *mitzvah* of *hachnosas orchim*, welcoming guests to his home, easing the travail of their lives, would stand to serve as a *z’chus*, merit, for his daughter.

It happened that another patient with the last name of *Herman* was at the hospital. Over the course of *Shabbos* this patient passed away. According to hospital regulations, a letter was supposed to have immediately been sent to the family of the deceased. By some quirk, a secretary erred and instead sent the death notification to the wrong

Herman family. She sent the letter to Rav Yaakov Yosef Herman. When the telegram arrived on *Shabbos*, the righteous Hermans refused to accept it. It was *Shabbos*; they would not disrupt the *kedushas*, sanctity, and serenity of *Shabbos*. They would wait it out. The telegram was forwarded instead to their sister-in-law who read it and went to speak to the Hermans. They refused to listen to anything that was not *Shabbos*-related.

On *Motzoei Shabbos*, another telegram arrived, apologizing profusely for the error. Indeed, they were pleased to inform the Hermans that their daughter's condition had improved, and she was expected to be released in a couple of days. When Rav Herman was informed of the mix-up in telegrams, he realized *p'shat*, the explanation of the verse in *Hoshanos*. The Jew is lauded for patiently waiting until the conclusion of *Shabbos* before addressing any non-*Shabbos* related issues. He is in no rush. The weekday can wait. Now, it is *Shabbos*. Today, he celebrates with Hashem.

Horav Zilberstein concludes with an incident that occurred concerning the saintly Rabbi Klonimus, father-in-law of the *Maharshal*, who lived at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The Jewish community constantly suffered from the brutal anti-Semites and their blood libels. The Christians would claim that the Jews killed Christian children, so that they could use their blood to mix into the *matzah* batter. While this claim was preposterous, the sadistic ruffians that comprised the peasant populace at the time did not require much more to agitate them sufficiently to create a pogrom against the Jews. During those dark times, the Jews were compelled to live surrounded and hounded by such hatred. Therefore, when a Christian child was found murdered on *Shabbos*, fingers were immediately pointed at the Jewish community. The Christian population was poised to obliterate the entire Jewish populace. Rabbi Klonimus immediately wrote various *sheimos*, *Kabbalistic* names and incantations, on a piece of paper and placed them by the murdered child's body. Then, to the shock and awe of both the Christian and Jewish communities, the child arose and revealed who had murdered him. He then fell back, dead. The Jewish community was spared.

Everyone was overjoyed, except Rabbi Klonimus, who, while happy to have saved the community, was chagrined that he had desecrated *Shabbos*. Veritably, it was a matter of *pikuach nefesh*, to save Jewish lives, but he was troubled that his "slate" felt imperfect. Thus, prior to returning his holy soul to its Source, Rabbi Klonimus instructed that for the next one hundred years whoever passed his grave should throw one stone on it. (The punishment for *Shabbos* desecration is stoning.) He did what he had to do, but he was still troubled. After all, *Shabbos* is special.

Va'ani Tefillah

ועל נשמותינו הפקודות לך – *V'al nishmoseinu ha'pekudos Lach*. And for our souls which are in safekeeping with You.

Chayeinu, our life; *nishmoseinu*, our souls/quality of life. We recognize that life without the *neshamah Shenasata bi*, the soul which You placed within me, has no meaning. What quality of life can be attributed to a life without meaning? Thus, we do not thank Hashem only for our lives, but for our souls as well, because one does not go without the other. Actually, our "life" is our *neshamah*, the spiritual, Heavenly component within us that endures forever, long after their physical body has ended its journey on this world.

What is the meaning of *ha'pekudos Lach*, "which are in safekeeping with You"? *Pikadon* in Hebrew means deposit or collateral. *Horav Yitzchak Kirzner*, זל, explains that the *neshamah* of a person is also called a *pikadon*, since part of the *neshamah* ascends to Heaven when we go to sleep at night. We pray that Hashem will "take care" of our *neshamah* and return it to us when we arise. Now, if we take a moment to digest this: At the moment of our awakening, we are "accepting" a delivery from Hashem: our *neshamah*! How can we just pull the blanket over our heads and go back to sleep?

Sponsored in loving memory of our dear mother, grandmother and great grandmother on her yahrzeit

Mrs. Hindy Herskowitz

מרת הינדא בת ר' יוסף צבי הלוי ע"ה - נפ' י"ו תמוז תשע"ד

Avi Herskowitz and family

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prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

לע"נ

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה