

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Pinchas

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רפואה שלמה פעסל בת גאלדא / לזכות חילינו

PLAY BALL!

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"Pinchas son of Elazar, son of Aharon the Kohen..." (25:11)

Mashal: A bar mitzvah boy once came with his father to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, R' Menachem Mendel Schneerson zt'l, for a blessing. The Rebbe briefly blessed the boy that he should grow to be a source of pride to the Jewish people and to his family. As they turned to leave, the Rebbe surprised the boy by asking him a question.

"Tell me, are you a baseball fan?"

The bar mitzvah boy nodded.

"Which team are you a fan of - the Yankees or the Dodgers?"

"The Dodgers, of course," replied the boy. (This was back in the 1950's.)

"Does your father take you out to games?" asked the Rebbe.

"Every once in a while," said the boy. "We were actually at a game a month ago."

"Really?" said the Rebbe. "How was the game?"

The boy made a face. "It was disappointing. By the sixth inning, the Dodgers were losing nine-to-two, so we decided to leave."

"Did the players also leave the game when you left?" the Rebbe continued to probe.

The boy rolled his eyes. "Of course not! There are players and fans. The fans can leave when they want; they're not part of the game and the game could, and does, continue after they leave. But the players need to stay and try to win until the game is over."

"That is the lesson I want you to know about Judaism," said the Rebbe with a smile. "You can either be a fan or a player. Be a player!"

Nimshal: The Prince of the Tribe of Shimon was committing a terrible act, an abomination, in front of the entire congregation. The elders wept in agony.

Moshe Rabbeinu was unsure how to respond, while the rest of the Jews simply stood around as spectators. Except for Pinchas. He took matters into his own hands. While everyone else was overcome with helplessness, Pinchas knew what he had to do. He was no fan - he was a player!

ZEAL FOR HASHEM

Reb Alexander Zusia Friedman

"Pinchas son of Elazar, son of Aharon the Kohen..." (25:11)

Because the tribes spoke disparagingly of him, saying: "Have you seen this grandson of Puti, the father of whose mother used to fatten calves for idolatrous sacrifices, and he has dared to slay a prince in Israel's tribes?" Therefore, the Torah comes and links his genealogy with Aharon. (Rashi)

The tribes of Israel suspected that Pinchas had slain Zimri because Pinchas, descendant of idol worshippers on his mother's side, was cruel by nature and didn't find it distasteful to shed blood. Therefore, the Torah traces his genealogy to Aharon the kohen, who "loved peace and pursued it," to show that Pinchas was a quiet and peace-loving man by nature and had slain Zimri solely out of zeal on behalf of G-d.

NOT YOUR TYPICAL HASTE

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"...in that he was zealous for My sake in the midst of them." (25:11)

Pinchas is called a zealot, which connotes someone who acts quickly and decisively against something that he deems wrong. However, the characteristic of hastiness is regarded as a negative trait, as the Kotzker Rebbe was fond of saying, "Haste in action results from laziness in the mind."

If so, how can we praise Pinchas for his hastiness in killing Zimri and Cozbi - perhaps it came from laziness in the mind, an inability to first think his actions through?

Despite his “hasty” action, it is clear that the Kotzker Rebbe’s words do not apply to Pinchas or to any other true zealot. They relate to someone who happens upon a situation and reacts immediately without thinking. This person’s laziness in first assessing the situation leads him to make rash decisions. However, since Pinchas’ whole life was dedicated to serving Hashem, it was not really a new situation that he found himself in, it was just another scenario in which to serve Hashem. Therefore, his haste did not come from laziness of the mind; it came from a lifetime of preparation and a constantly active mind that always sought the best way to serve his Creator.

ONE WITH THE PEOPLE

Reb Yitzchak of Vorka

“...in that he was zealous for My sake in the midst of them.” (25:11)

Even though Pinchas was so zealous for G-d’s cause, he remained “in the midst of them”; he remained “in the midst” of the people of Israel, refusing to set himself apart from them in any manner.

REMAINING AMONG THE PEOPLE

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“Pinchas... turned My anger away... in that he was zealous for My sake in the midst of them.” (25:11)

Rashi translates the words “*b’kano es kin’asi b’socham* - When he turned My anger away by his vengeance for Me among them,” in the following manner: “Showing his wrath, the wrath that I (Hashem) was to have shown.” What does the word “*b’socham*” (among them) represent? If it is referring to Zimri himself, the perpetrator of the sinful deed, why does the Torah employ a plural tense?

Rabbi Pinchas of Koritz zt’l gives us an insightful response. Often, when a zealous individual witnesses wrongdoing in a community, he organizes a group around him and encourages others to follow his lead, detaching themselves from the sinners, creating their own sin-free environment. This is how communities become fragmented and often even violence erupts.

However, the greatness of Pinchas was in his ability to avoid such an occurrence. When he saw the shameless immorality of Zimri, he immediately understood that drastic action was necessary. But in an extreme effort to resist splitting Klal Yisrael, he acted on his own, zealously, while at the same time remaining very much “among them” - part and parcel of the entire community. He did not create a breakaway sect consisting of the righteous and pious, but rather kept the *kehilla* intact, while at the same time uprooting the sinners from among them.

We learn from here the importance of always maintaining communal harmony. Even within the framework of correcting a negative situation, one should always work from “within” the community.

HEALTHY JEALOUSY

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

“...in that he was zealous for My sake in the midst of them.” (25:11)

In praising Pinchas’ act, which ended the deadly plague that G-d had brought upon Bnei Yisrael because of the sin of Ba’al Pe’or, G-d says about Pinchas, בקנאו את קנאתי בתוכם - that he was zealous for Hashem among Bnei Yisrael.

Rav Elimelech of Lizhensk, in Noam Elimelech, offers a unique interpretation of this pasuk, explaining the verb קנא not as “zealous,” but rather as “jealous,” as in the familiar Hebrew word קנאה - jealousy. Often, in our avodas Hashem, our ambition is stifled by the limits of our experience and our imagination. We sometimes fail to extend beyond our comfort zone because we simply do not and cannot imagine ourselves achieving more or reaching higher. Seeing other people achieve greatness can often serve as a powerful catalyst and source of motivation, giving us a glimpse of what we could potentially accomplish. Jealousy is, on the one hand, terribly self-destructive, a quality that has the power to “remove a person from the world” (Avos 4:21). The feeling that we need to have what others have, and do what others do, can ruin our lives. But on the other hand, as the Gemara (Bava Basra 22a) teaches, “קנאת סופרים - תרבה חכמה - Envy among scholars increases wisdom.” Seeing the accomplishments of others can inspire and motivate us, by showing us examples of greatness that we had previously not considered. When we see another person’s commitment to davening, to Torah learning, to chesed, or to other mitzvos, we are driven to emulate his example. This is a healthy form of קנאה - one which doesn’t make us resent our fellow, but which motivates us and creates ambition.

Rav Elimelech explains בקנאו את קנאתי בתוכם to mean that Pinchas’ courageous act had the effect of arousing feelings of קנאה within the hearts of the people. When they witnessed his passionate devotion to Hashem’s honor, which led him to do a drastic but necessary act, endangering his life and exposing himself to condemnation, they felt envious. They experienced קנאת סופרים, a desire and ambition to emulate Pinchas’ dedication to שמיים נבדוד.

For many years, the sports world thought it was not possible for an athlete to run a mile in under four minutes. The feat was finally achieved by an Englishman named Roger Bannister, in 1954. Less than two months later, a different athlete broke the record, and hundreds of runners have broken the four-minute barrier since. Once people saw that it could be done, the bar was raised. The same is true in avodas Hashem. When we see people achieving on a standard which we never thought possible, we become motivated to strive for that higher standard. קנאת סופרים works by opening our eyes to new vistas, bringing new levels of greatness into our line of vision, thereby driving us to work harder to achieve more.

PURE ALTRUISM

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"Pinchas son of Elazar, son of Aharon the Kohen turned My anger away..." (25:11)

In response to Pinchas' heroic act of sanctifying Hashem's name by killing Zimri and Kosbi, the Gemara (Sanhedrin 82b) explains that the tribes began humiliating him, saying "Did you see this son of Puti, whose mother's father fattened calves for idolatry. And he killed the Prince of a tribe of Israel?!"

To counter their implied claim, explains Rashi, "The Torah comes and traces his ancestry to Aharon" to highlight that Pinchas was not only a grandson of Yisro (who was the "son of Puti") but also the grandson of Aharon.

If the tribes' claim against Pinchas was that he killed Zimri unjustly, what is the relevance of mentioning his maternal grandfather's idolatrous past; how does it support their argument?

Furthermore, surely the tribes knew that Pinchas had two grandfathers, the other being Aharon. Therefore, how does the fact that the Torah defends Pinchas by tracing back his ancestry to Aharon hope to appease the tribes and silence their insults?

Many commentators explain that the tribes were not criticizing Pinchas' actions per se; rather, they merely intended to diminish the greatness of his deed.

They were suggesting that in reality it was engrained in Pinchas' nature to kill, due to his maternal grandfather's idolatrous heritage of cruelty and killing. And although they undoubtedly agreed that Zimri's death was justified and praiseworthy, they felt that Pinchas did not deserve total credit for carrying out an act which was so inherently part of his nature.

In essence, they claimed, if Pinchas' tendencies would not have been so disproportionately geared towards violence and murder, then he would never have dared to kill Zimri.

For this reason, Hashem calls Pinchas "son of Aharon HaKohen," to declare to those who doubted the heroism of his act that Pinchas was not influenced in any way by his idolatrous lineage. On the contrary, the Torah is asserting that his nature derived from his grandfather Aharon, the figure who is praised with the title "lover of peace, pursuer of peace" (Pirkei Avos 1:12).

Therefore, the Torah came to testify that Pinchas deserved full credit for killing Zimri, because his act was actually totally contrary to his peaceful nature.

In fact, Rav Avigdor Brazil explains that Pinchas' deed was so pure and free of personal desire for glory and honor, that the Torah split the whole episode into two Parshas, with Zimri's death recorded at the end of Parshas Balak, and Pinchas' reward mentioned in Parshas Pinchas. This, according to Rav Brazil, is to show that Pinchas did not for a second consider any reward or honor he would receive; his only desire was to restore the greatness of Hashem's name among His People.

INTRODUCING IDEALS

Reb Menachem Mendel of Kotzk

"...in that he was zealous for My sake in the midst of them." (25:11)

By killing Zimri out of his own zeal for G-d's sake, Pinchas brought into "the midst" of the Jewish people the ideals of righteous zeal, which would make them utterly unable to tolerate idol worship.

REVEALING DIVINE WILL

Reb Noson of Breslov

"Pinchas son of Elazar, son of Aharon the Kohen..." (25:11)

We read Parashat Pinchas and Parashat Matot during the Three Weeks, as these Torah portions reflect the themes of this time period. The destruction of the Temple began on the Seventeenth of Tammuz, when the Jews made the golden calf that concealed Divine Will. Pinchas, through his zealotry for G-d, revealed Divine Will.

Furthermore, Parashat Pinchas speaks of the sacrifices brought on the Festivals, which also reveal Divine Will by way of the miracles that occurred on those days.

Parashat Matot speaks of vows, which allow a person to single-handedly transform what is permitted into what is prohibited. This shows the power of free choice, which one can use to reveal G-d's Will.

ATTAINING IMMORTALITY

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"Pinchas son of Elazar, son of Aharon the Kohen..." (25:11)

Our Sages teach us that "Pinchas is Eliyahu" (Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer 47; Zohar 2:190a; Bava Metzia 114b) and that "he lives on and endures" (Zohar 2:197a-b). Why did Pinchas merit everlasting life?

The answer is based on the following principle: Man's body is inherently distant from Divine service, for the nature of the body is to concern itself only with its own needs. It is only the soul within man that continuously concerns itself with the fear of G-d.

This nature of the soul is altogether different than the nature of the body. For this reason, the body eventually descends to the grave. In reality, if the body were to serve G-d continuously, like the soul, a person would not die, and this was indeed the case prior to the sin of Adam - humanity was created to be immortal.

Pinchas was truly prepared to die in this episode, as our Sages explain (Sanhedrin 82a). As such, Pinchas's body, throughout the duration of this episode, was not concerned with its bodily needs, and was truly only serving G-d, just as was his soul. This was so because Pinchas's body was as if it were not even there; for he gave himself over to possible death in this act, which he did in order to fulfill G-d's will. Consequently, the body of Pinchas was so purified that it continued to endure.

ZEALOUS PEACE

Kosnos Ohr

"Behold I give to him My covenant of peace..." (25:12)

Even though zeal is the opposite of peace and may indeed be equated with open controversy, the Torah states that honest zeal on behalf of a sacred ideal leads to peace.

LOVE = PEACE

Rebbe Nachman

"Behold I give to him My covenant of peace..." (25:12)

Originally, G-d intended to have the priesthood come from Shem. But because Shem blessed Avraham before blessing G-d (see Bereishis 14:19-20), the priesthood was taken from Shem and given to Avraham. (Nedarim 32b)

As a result of avenging Zimri's immorality, Pinchas attained the quality of "love" associated with Avraham. Love and peace are synonymous. Thus, Pinchas attained the "covenant of peace... a covenant of eternal priesthood." (See Likutey Moharan I, 34:7; *ibid.*, 34:9)

TAKING A STAND

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Behold I give to him My covenant of peace..." (25:12)

The fact that Pinchas was much younger than Moshe did not prevent him from acting in his presence, once it became clear that Moshe had forgotten what needed to be done.

Similarly, we should not be intimidated when we see that those of greater stature are not righting some wrong that must be addressed. It could well be, as in the case of Pinchas, that Divine providence is keeping them silent in order that a "less qualified" individual seize the moment and answer destiny's call to greatness.

When Divine providence presents us with an opportunity to right some wrong in the world, we must pursue it with total self-sacrifice, as did Pinchas, who risked his life when he slew Zimri. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 2, p. 342) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

UNINFLUENCED BY OTHERS

Chomas Aish

"...because he [Pinchas] was zealous on behalf of his G-d..." (25:13)

Sinners habitually justify their conduct by pointing to others and saying, "He also did it."

It is for this reason that G-d, blessed be His Name, addressed the Ten Commandments in the second person singular. Every Jew was to feel that the Torah had been given to him or her alone, and that their service should not be based on other people's behavior.

Surely, when Pinchas witnessed the immoral conduct of Zimri and the Midianite woman, he could have pointed to Moshe, Aharon and the seventy elders and said, "If they take no action, why should I be more zealous than they?" However, he didn't wait to see what they would do, but proceeded to do what he felt had to be done on behalf of G-d's honor. Therefore, it is written, "because he was zealous for his G-d." He acted as if G-d had been his alone, believing that it was his duty to defend G-d's honor even if no one else would do it.

OVERRIDING INTELLECT

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"It will be for him and for his descendants after him an eternal covenant of priesthood..." (25:13)

The specific sin that Pinchas atoned for was the people's sin of having worshiped the idol Pe'or (see Bamidbar 25:1-9). In general, this form of idolatry represents the idealization and pursuit of sensual pleasure for its own sake?

Since sensual pleasure exerts such a strong pull on us that it can at times override our intellect, our one recourse is our ability to override our intellect in a positive way - in other words, our determination to do what is right regardless of what our imagination or intellect may or may not be drawing us to. In this way, we follow in the steps of Pinchas, whose self-sacrifice and unstoppable devotion to G-d both saved the rest of the Jewish people and secured the greatest blessings for himself and his descendants for all time. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

PURSUE POSITIVITY

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"Distress and defeat the Midianites; for they distress you with their plots." (25:17-18)

After a Jewish prince and Midianite woman act immorally and are killed, G-d directs the Jewish people to "distress and defeat" the Midianite people "for they distress you with their plots" (25:17-18). How is the Midyan threat different from other perils, and how is G-d's response an appropriate counter to their threat?

Ohr HaChaim proposes that the Midianites tried not only to kill Jews but also to undermine their spirituality. This command created a barrier between the Jews and those whose every thought and action is to harm them.

While this mandate is practically helpful in combating those that mean us harm, the inverse can be helpful for those that mean us well. When we are surrounded by people who have our best interests at heart, it is prudent to trust them even when we do not necessarily see the how or the why. Parents know this, children eventually learn this, and true friends appreciate this concept. In the same way that we proactively avoid negative influences around us, we should likewise establish positive environments that foster positivity, security, and growth.

FOCUSING THE GOOD

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"It was after the plague - and Hashem spoke to Moshe and to Elazar the son of Aharon HaKohen, saying, 'Take a census of the entire Jewish People...' (26:1-2)

By instructing Moshe to take a census of the people right after mentioning the plague that killed so many of them, Hashem is compared to a dedicated shepherd who counts his remaining flock after they are slaughtered by a pack of wolves.

One could ask, though, there are two ways to know how many people were killed: one could count the remainder of the people - as we see from our verse; or one could simply count the number of victims. Why did Hashem tell Moshe to count the entire Jewish People in order establish that there were 24,000 victims of the plague (Bamidbar 25:9), why not just count the victims? Surely, counting 24,000 people instead of over 600,000 (ibid., 25:51) would have been a far less arduous task?!

Perhaps one could answer that rather than focusing on the negative actions of the Jewish People - namely their sins which brought about the plague - Hashem instead wanted to focus on their virtues - namely that the remainder of the People would merit to enter into Eretz Yisrael. Therefore, despite being a more cumbersome count, the lesson we learn is that even when it is more difficult, we should always try to focus on the good.

This message of focusing only on the good was brought to light in a very beautiful way when Chaim Sher met his former cheder Rebbe at a teachers' conference (as related in the name of Rav Shlomo Levenstein). After introducing himself, Chaim told his former teacher that it was because of the following incident that had made him decide to be a cheder Rebbe.

In Chaim's class, there was a wealthy boy who received an expensive watch as a gift which became quite an attraction in class. After everyone's initial excitement, the boys went to recess, and the watch was left on the table... until someone took it. The Rebbe was informed that one of the classmates had stolen the watch, and when no one volunteered to return it, he told everyone to line up against the wall with their eyes closed and he would check their pockets. Chaim explained that the Rebbe checked everyone's pockets one by one until he came to his, where he immediately found the watch. Chaim was terrified. But nothing happened. A few minutes later the Rebbe sat down at his desk with the watch in front of him. No one had seen where the watch had been found, and the Rebbe announced that the watch had not been "stolen" by a bad boy, rather it had been taken by a good boy who was struggling with his yetzer hara, and no more was said about the incident. Chaim explained that he was still terrified that the Rebbe would punish him privately, but when the Rebbe never said anything to him, not that day or any other, he realized that he had been saved from severe embarrassment, and said to himself, if this is what it means to be a Rebbe, then I want to be one too.

Chaim finished his story and sheepishly said, "That Rebbe was you. But please tell me, how was it that you never looked at me any differently after you found the watch in my pocket? I never sensed any disappointment or frustration from you. How did you do it?"

His former Rebbe looked at Chaim and said, "I never knew it was you, for I too closed my eyes while I did the search."

DIFFICULTIES = OPPORTUNITIES

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"And Dosson and Aviram - the same Dosson and Aviram the chosen of the assembly, who incited against Moshe and Aharon..." (26:9)

Dosson and Aviram had a long history of trouble-making. They were the ones who told Pharaoh that Moshe killed an Egyptian (Rashi, Shemos 4:19); they campaigned against Moshe when he came back to redeem the Jewish People (Rashi, Shemos 5:20); and in fact, they did not leave Egypt with the rest of the Jewish People - only once they saw that Egypt had been defeated did they decide to leave (Targum Yonasan, Shemos 14:3). They were the ones who hoarded the mannah and attempted to disprove Moshe who said that there would be no mannah found on Shabbos (Rashi, Shemos 16:20).

In short, as the Gemara says (Megillah 11a), "they were evil from their beginning to their end."

Despite all this, the verse calls them "the chosen of the assembly" - a term of praise awarded to those who sat with Moshe and Aharon and received advice and assistance (Chofetz Chaim HaChadash Al HaTorah, p. 471).

One would have expected that these two would have been sent away a long time ago; or at the very least, not be welcome in the presence of Moshe and Aharon. But not only are they not being banished, they are receiving advice and support from them?!

Although there are circumstances when certain people do need to be sent away, the Chofetz Chaim notes that Moshe and Aharon felt that in this case, doing so would have caused greater damage. As such, Moshe and Aharon understood that their role was to help Dosson and Aviram and encourage them to mend their ways despite the personal vendetta held against them.

In life, we invariably have to face difficult people or challenging circumstances. Often, we feel that the best thing for us is to escape the situation by ignoring the person or hide ourselves away from the challenge we are facing. There are times when this is the right thing to do, but we learn from Moshe and Aharon to put our personal feelings aside as much as possible and look at the wider picture. Specifically, we must realize that Hashem is directing all our experiences, and each challenge we face is another opportunity to grow. As such, we may gain more from tackling a challenge than from running away from it.

This can be demonstrated using the following parable:

Reuven and Shimon met in Heaven. In life, Reuven was very needy, his observance was shaky, and he required a lot of attention and encouragement. Shimon was a dedicated and religious Jew and spent a lot of energy keeping Reuven afloat. When they met, Shimon was delighted and exclaimed, "Reuven, I'm so glad that I got you here!"

"Actually," replied Reuven, "it was me who got you here!"

OUT OF THE DEPTHS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Korach's sons did not die [in their father's mutiny]". (26:11)

(G-d instructed Moshe to take a census of the Jewish people after the deaths caused by the epidemic and the administration of justice. Included in this census were the sons of Korach, the instigator of the mutiny against Moshe 38 years earlier.)

Rashi tells us that Korach's sons repented in their hearts. Therefore, although they were swallowed into the earth along with the rest of the rebels, not only did they not die, but G-d prepared a shelter for them: "a high place was fortified for them in the subterranean realm."

We see that their repentance transformed what would have otherwise been an experience of being buried in the depths into an experience of being sheltered in a "high place," safe from harm. Similarly, if it ever seems to us that we are buried in the depths of depression or negativity, repentance can transform that experience into one of being lifted up far above any threat or danger, sheltered by G-d's providence and loving concern. (Sefer HaSichot 5750, vol. 2, p. 523) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

The sons of Korach played a key role in his rebellion, and were therefore swallowed up into the ground along with the other rebels. However, since Korach's sons - unlike the others - repented in their hearts, they were spared the death penalty; G-d allowed them to stay alive in an underground cave until the rest of their generation died out, after which He allowed them to emerge from hiding and resume their lives in the community. Had they acted upon their regret, they would have been spared even this lesser punishment. Their survival shows us the tremendous power of repentance - even when it is not acted upon as it should be.

This insight should quiet any doubts that we may have about the possibility of redemption in our times. Even merely thinking about repenting is sufficient to bring about the final Redemption - especially when this is added to the merits we have accrued throughout our long exile: the Torah we have studied, the commandments we have performed, and the martyrdom we have suffered. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 33, pp. 170) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

HASHEM IS IN CONTROL

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

"These are the children of Dan to their families... sixty-four thousand and four hundred." (26:42-43)

Hashem commands Moshe and Aharon to take another census of the Jewish people in preparation of entering Eretz Yisrael (26:1-65). The Torah records that the tribe of Binyamin had a population of 45,600. The Torah lists the number count of the tribe of Dan as 64,400.

The Chofetz Chaim notes that at that point Shevet Dan was larger than Shevet Binyamin despite the fact that Dan had only one son named Chushim, who was mute, whereas Binyamin had ten children. The Chofetz Chaim points out that we see from here that it does not matter whether something seems more or less likely to happen. A person can have one child and still have many more descendants than a person who has ten children.

Our successes in all walks of life are solely dependent on the will of Hashem. While we have to put in our efforts as a prerequisite, it is Hashem, and only Hashem, Who determines our ultimate achievements and accomplishments.

It is important that we internalize this message particularly during these weeks of reflection when we have the chance to reorient how we approach life. Do we continue to fool ourselves into thinking that we are in control, or do we begin to strengthen our emunah in Hashem and accept and embrace that He is in control? With this approach in mind, we can hopefully help to rebuild the third Beis HaMikdash speedily in our days!

(Similarly, Rabbi Elimelech Biderman said: The Chofetz Chaim teaches us a valuable lesson from this: Hashem's plan for the future might not always be apparent at the onset. Binyamin the son of Yakov Avinu had ten sons. Dan on the other hand, had only one son who was hearing impaired. At the onset it may have seemed to Dan that his progeny would be significantly limited. He had only one child, and that child had limitations. A few generations later though, we see this assumption was unfounded. Hashem runs the world. It doesn't matter how things may appear.)

DEFINED BY KINDNESS

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"And the name of Asher's daughter was Serach..." (26:46)

Nestled within the latest census is an obscure mention: "And the name of Asher's daughter was Serach" (26:46). Rashi points out that she was one of the original seventy that entered Egypt, so she is mentioned here as having survived two hundred and ten years in Egypt and forty years in the desert. Although surviving all those years is quite an accomplishment, why does the Torah mention it here in the middle of a census? Perhaps more importantly, how did Serach survive all this time? What is her secret?

Ramban and other commentaries suggest that the Torah mentions unique situations, such as the daughters of Tzelofchad who, having had no males to claim an inheritance, requested their father's portion of land in Israel. What makes Serach unique is two things: (1) she was born to Asher's wife from a different husband (Ramban on this verse), and (2) although her name was Serach, she was known as "the daughter of Asher," known for her pious and kind ways (Chizkuni).

This highlights how far having a name associated with kindness can take us. The "and" that begins our sentence emphasizes that we are more than just names and numbers in history books but a collection of the actions and specifically acts of kindness that define us.

THREEFOLD RELATIONSHIP

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[G-d told Moshe,] 'The land will be divided up among these [whom you just counted].'" (26:53)

The Land of Israel was divided among the Jewish people in three ways: (1) by population - i.e., the larger the tribe, the more land it received; (2) by lot, which determined which tribe received which area; and (3) through inheritance, by which the fathers' estates were passed down to their children.

These three methods mirror the three different facets of our relationship with G-d: (1) We are connected to G-d in a service-reward relationship. This mirrors the logical division of the land by population. (2) We were chosen by G-d to be His people, regardless of how well we live up to our side of our contractual relationship with Him. This mirrors the division of the land by lot, which is not dictated by logic. (3) We are connected to G-d because we are part of Him; since we are part of G-d, He does not even need to choose us. This mirrors the division of the land by inheritance, for an heir inherits his parents automatically; he does not have to earn his inheritance, nor does his parent need to choose him as their heir.

All three facets of our relationship with G-d are important, but in the Messianic future our inheritance-relationship with G-d will become paramount. It is this aspect of our relationship that we should try to emphasize now, as we prepare ourselves for the imminent Messianic Redemption. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 28, pp. 176-181) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

SOLICITING HELP FROM ABOVE

Reb Noson of Breslov

"By lottery shall the land be divided, according to the names of their fathers' tribes they shall inherit." (26:55)

Not only did the lot fall according to *ruach hakodesh* (Divine inspiration), but the lot itself called out: "I, the lot, have come up for this portion for this tribe." (Rashi on 26:54)

All men possess freedom of choice and are enjoined to choose wisely. As this often proves difficult, one can solicit help from Above to make the correct choices. (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 240-121a)

HONORING THEIR MEMORIES

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"By lottery shall the land be divided, according to the names of their fathers' tribes they shall inherit." (26:55)

G-d instructs Moshe to divide the land among the tribes "...by lottery shall the land be divided, according to the names of their fathers' tribes they shall inherit" (26:55). If the tribes are to inherit the land, why does the Torah add the extra word "names" to make it sound like the names are inheriting the land rather than the people?

Rav Hirsch explains that the people's perseverance through the many challenges they faced to inherit the land provides a testament and honor to their ancestors' names and legacies. When we make the right decisions or act with integrity, it not only helps us but also honors the names and memories of those who came before us.

RECTIFYING THE PAST

Reb Noson of Breslov

"And they approached; the daughters of Tzelofchad the son of Cheipher, the son of Makhir, the son of Menasheh, from the family of Manasseh the son of Yosef..." (27:1)

The Torah traces the genealogy of the daughters of Tzelofchad back to Joseph, who loved the Land so much that he swore his brothers to bring his bones there for burial after they left Egypt. Because they also desired a portion in the Land, these righteous descendants of Joseph merited to introduce this Torah passage detailing the laws of inheritance. (Rashi)

Children provide the main rectification for the souls of their parents. By inheriting what their parents leave behind, children continue their parents' work and connect future generations with past generations, all the way back to the time of Adam. When Adam ate from the Tree, he blemished his descendants. We are the rectification for him and for all succeeding generations. (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 236a-472)

FEMININE INFLUENCE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"And they approached; the daughters of Tzelofchad [to present their case to Moshe]..." (27:1)

Tzelofchad's daughters' desire for a portion of the Land of Israel was characteristic of all the Jewish women of their generation. Due to their love of the land, none of these women sympathized with the spies' counsel against entering it (Rashi on Bamidbar 26:64).

The purpose of creation is to reveal G-d's presence in the world, which the Jewish people were meant to accomplish by entering the Land of Israel and engaging in mundane life in a holy way. This is why the Jewish women cherished the Land of Israel. They knew that "the eyes of G-d are always upon it" (Devarim 11:12), meaning that it is uniquely suited to revealing the Divine dimension within all mundane acts.

By cherishing this ideal, Jewish women in all places can positively influence not only their own conduct but that of their husbands, both within and outside the home. This, in turn, ensures Divine blessing in all aspects of their physical lives, as well as those of their families. (Hitva'aduyot 5717, vol. 3, pp. 133-137) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

PERFECT TIMING

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"And they approached; the daughters of Tzelofchad. They stood before Moshe and before Elazar HaKohen and before the princes." (27:1-2)

The daughters of Tzelofchad were praiseworthy for many reasons. They were well versed in Torah knowledge. They demonstrated a clear grasp of Jewish jurisprudence, and their claim to a portion of Eretz Yisrael was not rooted in their desire for more possessions. They were motivated by a pure and sincere love of Eretz Yisrael. This love was so deep that it overshadowed their normal desire for material acquisitions.

Although these women had many virtues, the medrash highlights one virtue in particular - their timing. They waited for the most opportune time to approach Moshe and only then presented their claim. Why does the medrash single out this seemingly minor attribute for praise above all the other fine qualities they possessed?

Rabbi Henach Lebowitz zt'l explains: The medrash is teaching us that the crowning virtue of a human being is *seichel* - common sense. Without this, a person can possess intellectual brilliance, be a storehouse of knowledge with wonderful intentions, and yet fail in his endeavors. The b'nos Tzelofchad were aware that it made a crucial difference when they approached Moshe. They understood human nature sufficiently to know the appropriate time for their presentation. This understanding and insight enabled them to succeed.

It has been noted that common sense is highly uncommon. A man can master the complexities of a supercomputer, yet not be able to interact with his fellow man. Through the study of Torah, with the analysis and honest introspection of *mussar*, we can deepen our understanding of human nature and increase our common sense.

UNBIASED JUDGEMENT

Reb Alexander Zusia Friedman

"And Moshe brought their case before Hashem..." (27:5)

When Tzelofchad's daughters brought their case before Moshe, they told him that their late father had not been "among the company of those who gathered themselves together against G-d in the company of Korach" (27:3), thus informing him that their father had not been among Moshe's adversaries. Moshe therefore conceived a personal interest in their welfare and so felt disqualified to decide the case. This is why Moshe brought the case of Tzelofchad's daughters before G-d.

[Similarly, Rabbi Dovid Hoffman writes: Rabbeinu Yosef Babad zt'l (Minchas Chinuch) provides an insightful explanation based on an ethical approach (unlike Rashi, who quotes from the Talmudic source).

When a judge is asked to make a ruling, he must be careful not to accept a bribe, which will sway his judgment. There are, however, two types of bribery: financial bribery - when one of the litigants attempts to hand over money to a judge in exchange for a favorable ruling. The second type is known as verbal bribery, which manifests in the words of the litigants how they present their case, and what influence it can have on the judge. If one knows how to frame the argument for this particular judge to "press his button," so to speak - he can use that knowledge to intimidate, flatter or sway the judge to rule in his favor.

When the daughters of Tzelofchad used the argument that their father was not part of the Korach revolt against Moshe and Aharon, it was, in a sense, a form of verbal bribery, since consciously or subconsciously, Moshe would be pleased with their words. In fact, when he heard these words, he was pleased and immediately recognized the effect it might have on his ability to judge the case clearly. At that very moment, Moshe knew he had no choice but to excuse himself from rendering a verdict, and left the final ruling up to Hashem.]

DESIRE TO BEQUEATH

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"And Moshe brought their case before Hashem..." (27:5)

The underlying principle here is as follows: A father gets pleasure knowing that he leaves an inheritance for his children. It was this feeling that Moshe awakened in G-d, for we are called "children of G-d" (Devarim 14:1). Moshe aroused this dynamic, namely, that G-d bequeath to us all manner of goodness.

This is the underlying idea expressed in the verse "So Moshe brought their case," i.e., the laws of inheritance, "before G-d." Moshe awakened this quality within G-d.

SMALL REQUEST, LARGE REWARD

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

"The plea of Tzelofchad's daughters is just; give them a hereditary holding among their father's kinsmen..." (27:7)

The Divrei Yisrael says a vort on this week's Parshah: The daughters of Tzelofchad asked for a portion in the land of Eretz Yisrael. Hashem told Moshe Rabbeinu, "Tzelofchad's daughters speak justly. Give them a portion of their inheritance." Rashi explains that the double expression of נתן נתן indicates that Hashem told Moshe Rabbeinu to give them two shares.

That's how it is, says the Divrei Yisrael. The daughters of Tzelofchad didn't ask for a lot. They didn't need much. They were willing to be content with a smaller portion. All they asked for was the minimum they needed to support themselves. Precisely because of this, Hashem told Moshe Rabbeinu, "They aren't asking for more than they need? Give them double!" Because one who is satisfied with a little receives a lot!

EMBRACING THE CHALLENGE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Speak to the Israelites, saying, 'If a man dies and has no son, you must transfer his inheritance to his daughter.'" (27:8)

Allegorically, this verse teaches us that when someone whom Divine providence has seemingly appointed for some purpose is absent, we should not hesitate to stand up and fill their role. In the words of the sages (Avos 2:5), "In a place where there are no men, strive to be a man."

This applies, first of all, on a personal level. We all possess both "male" and "female" qualities. In some situations, we might think that we do not possess the required "male" qualities to accept some challenge that Divine providence has presented us with. If that is indeed the case, it does not mean that we are excused from facing the challenge; rather, we must face it with our "female" qualities. The reverse is equally true.

Secondly, today's women are able to affect the world in ways that only men could formerly. This being the case, it is clear that G-d wants today's women to not only fulfill their uniquely feminine roles but utilize their expanded abilities and opportunities to spread Divine consciousness even in ways formerly available only to men. (Hitva'aduyot 5715, vol. 2, pp. 208-212) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

POWER OF PRAYER

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[And Moshe said to G-d,] 'May Hashem, G-d of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation... who will take them out and bring them in...'" (27:16-17)

Moshe knew full well that G-d would provide a leader for the Jewish people after his death. However, he was concerned that on account of the incident of the Golden Calf, G-d would decide that the people did not deserve a leader similar to him, that is, one uniquely blessed with the same qualities that he himself possessed.

Moshe had also learned from the incident of the Golden Calf that G-d allows Himself to be influenced by our prayers, even altering His plans on their account. He therefore now, as then, asked G-d to deal with the Jewish people beyond the strict measure of the law. Now, as then, G-d assented to Moshe's pleas.

From this, we see both how necessary our prayers are and how powerful they are. G-d wants us to ask Him to alter His plans for our better interests. (Hitva'aduyot 5745, vol. 5, pp. 2642-2643, 2655-2657) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

SPIRIT OF FLESH

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"May Hashem, the G-d of spirits of all flesh..." (27:16)

In general, one should give other Jews the benefit of the doubt. Their failure to fulfill G-d's will continuously, as angels do, can be attributed to their preoccupation with earning a livelihood. This is why it says that Avraham was a man of kindness (Zohar 1:47b): He always found extenuating circumstances to excuse the shortcomings of others. For this reason, Avraham gave food to the angels - to beings that have no need for physical food (Bereishis 18:8). He wanted to show them the needs of mortal man, so that they would not be inclined to notice faults in the Jewish people.

This also explains why Moshe had prayed previously (Bamidbar 16:22), "Hashem, the G-d of spirits of all flesh," meaning that Moshe implored G-d to focus on the mortality of humanity, to consider that since a person is flesh and blood, he has to look after his livelihood. Because of this, a person is at times not completely devoted to Divine service. Likewise here, Moshe said, "Let the G-d of spirits of all flesh appoint a man..." that is, "Appoint for them a judge and leader who will always find excuses for the shortcomings of the Jewish people, just as You judge a person favorably, who does not serve You continuously." This is what Moshe asked of G-d, to appoint a leader for the Jewish people who would always find extenuating circumstances to excuse the shortcomings of the Jewish people.

This, then, is a deeper meaning of the verse "Let Hashem, the G-d of spirits of all flesh, appoint a man" - "Just as You are 'the G-d of spirits of all flesh,' in that You always find extenuating circumstances to excuse their shortcomings, similarly, appoint a like-minded 'man over the congregation,' so the leader of the Jewish people will also always find extenuating circumstances to excuse the shortcomings of the Jewish people."

Another explanation of this verse: In general, G-d confers His bounty first to the world of seraphim and then to the world of the holy chayos. From there, the bounty flows to the Jewish people. G-d confers His bounty to the higher worlds only when the Jewish people can also receive the bounty. Thus, G-d reduces this bounty and confers it in accordance with the capacity of the Jewish people to receive this bounty. It follows that all the kindness that G-d bestows upon the higher worlds is proportionate to the ability of the lower worlds to receive it.

This is the mystical meaning of what Moshe said (Bamidbar 16:22), "Hashem, the G-d of spirits of all flesh." What Moshe asked was, "Hashem, the G-d of spirits," meaning, "G-d, You are the G-d Who confers the spirituality that You confer upon all the higher worlds" "to all flesh," meaning "commensurate with man's ability to accept."

(The prefix ל can mean both "of" and "to." Thus, the words "G-d of the spirits of all flesh" can be interpreted to mean, "G-d of the spirituality [that is apportioned according] to [the capacity] of all flesh [to receive it].")

Moshe continued: Similarly, "Let G-d appoint a leader over the congregation such that the leader of the congregation will lead the congregation as You conduct yourself with the Jewish people."

(Moshe asked G-d to appoint a leader who would tailor the intensity of his leadership to those he would lead.)

This explains why the preceding verse says (Bamidbar 27:15), "Moshe spoke to G-d, saying." Here, the word "saying" seems to be redundant, for to whom should G-d repeat what Moshe told him? (See Rashi on Bamidbar 12:13)

(Generally, the word "saying" that follows the words "G-d spoke to Moshe" means that G-d instructed Moshe to repeat what He said to someone else, usually the Jewish people. Here, the same formula is used in reverse, but there seems to be no one to whom Moshe is asking G-d to repeat his request.)

In reality, however, Moshe was asking G-d to appoint a suitable leader over the Jewish people, and he asked not just for his generation; rather, he asked for all subsequent generations. This idea is implied by the apparently redundant word "saying," which suggests continuity. Moshe asked this on behalf of all the subsequent generations. (See Bereishis Rabbah 70:1)

Another explanation of this verse: It is axiomatic that the innate desire of the soul is to serve G-d. Only the body experiences physical desires. Now, both the body and the soul are G-d's handiwork. So just as the soul was given the ability by G-d to serve Him, so too G-d has the ability to imbue the body with a similar intrinsic desire to engage in His service.

As such, we have a valid complaint to G-d, grounds upon which to ask Him to forgive us for our sins, since G-d has the ability to imbue the body with the desire to serve Him.

Now, the soul - which longs to worship G-d - is referred to as a "spirit" (ruach). As it says (II Shmuel 23:2), "the spirit (ruach) of G-d spoke within me." The body, by contrast, is referred to as "flesh" (Zohar 1:20b).

This, then, is what this verse intimates here when it says, "Hashem, the G-d of spirits," meaning, "You, Who have made our souls intrinsically desire Your service, please make it the same for 'all flesh,'" i.e., the body, as explained above.

HOLY JESTERS

Baal Shem Tov

"[And Moshe said to G-d,] 'May Hashem, G-d of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation... who will take them out and bring them in...'" (27:16-17)

People tend to fill their years with a vast amount of chatter, idle talk, sharing stories and tidbits, and similar mundane speech.

The spiritual leader of a generation has the ability to elevate all this mundane speech. He can "take them out and bring them in"; meaning, he can take the speech out of its mundane state and bring it into the realm of sanctity.

He accomplishes this by connecting their mundane exchanges with the realm of sanctity in a manner similar to the case of the two jesters described in the Talmud in Tractate Taanis. The jesters deliberately employed light banter for the sake of heaven, telling jokes to depressed people to lighten their mood and restore a measure of optimism. In doing so, these jesters were able to elevate the mundane conversations of the people they encountered.

THE LEADER MUST LEAD

Avnei Ezel

"[And Moshe said to G-d,] 'May Hashem, G-d of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation... who will take them out and bring them in...'" (27:16-17)

A true leader must "go out before" his people and not trail behind them. He must raise them to his level and not allow himself to descend to theirs.

He must "go out before them" and "come in before them," always at the head of his people. He must have them follow him, and not keep looking back to see what they want and then follow their wishes.

A leader who truly leads his people can "lead them out" from corruption and "bring them in" to holiness (as explained by the Chiddushei HaRim).

THE LEADER, THE DEFENDER

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

"[And Moshe said to G-d,] 'May Hashem, G-d of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation... who will take them out and bring them in...'" (27:16-17)

After being told that he would soon pass away, Moshe turned to Hashem and asked that He appoint a worthy successor. He pleads - "May Hashem, the G-d of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the nation" (27:16). G-d responded by commanding Moshe to appoint his famous student, Yehoshua, as the next leader of Bnei Yisrael.

Why did Moshe refer to Hashem as "אלוקי הרוחות לכל בשר" - G-d of the spirits of all flesh"? What is the precise meaning of this description? Rashi explains that Moshe was saying: "Master of the world! It is revealed and known to You the mind of each and every person, that they are different from one another. Appoint for them a leader who will tolerate each person according to his mind."

One of the vital qualities needed for competent leadership is the ability to understand and respect people's differences. A good leader does not seek to make carbon copies of himself, to force people to act and think the same way he does. A good leader supports individuality, and encourages each person to actualize his unique potential and achieve to the best of his capabilities.

Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, in *Kedushas Levi*, offers a different explanation for the phrase "אלוקי הרוחות לכל בשר." He writes that Moshe beseeched Hashem to appoint a leader who would be מלמד זכות - come to the defense of all his fellow Jews. Hashem is אלוקי הרוחות לכל בשר, understanding our nature, our needs, our temptations and our struggles, and He judges us favorably as a result.

Moshe wanted that the next leader of Bnei Yisrael would do the same. He wanted the people to be led by someone who wouldn't rush to judge, condemn and criticize, but to the contrary, would love, support, encourage, and defend.

Moshe wanted Hashem to appoint a leader who, like him, would advocate on the people's behalf at their worst moments of failure.

Rav Levi Yitzchak explains in this context why Avraham Avinu served a scrumptious meal to the angels that visited him. Avraham wanted the angels to experience the physical delights that tempt us human beings, so they would get a sense of how vulnerable people are, how easily people can be lured to sin and distracted from the service of Hashem. The angels would then be compassionate and gracious, and advocate on the people's behalf before the Heavenly Tribunal, rather than prosecute against them.

This insight by Rav Levi Yitzchak is actually autobiographical. Rav Levi Yitzchak is famously known as "סניגורן של ישראל" - the defender of Yisrael," as he would always judge his fellow Jew favorably, and advocate on Am Yisrael's behalf before Hashem. He taught and emphasized the importance of לימוד זכות, coming to our fellow's defense, reserving judgment and viewing others with compassion and sensitivity. The kind of leadership that he describes Moshe as demanding for Am Yisrael was the kind of leadership that he himself displayed, and one which sets an example for all of us to follow in all our dealings and interactions with other people.

KNOWING THEIR NEEDS

Kozhnutzer Maggid

"So that the assembly of Hashem should not be like sheep without their shepherd..." (27:17)

Moshe asked of Hashem that He should appoint a leader "of all flesh" - basar (בשר). The letters בשר can be rearranged to שבר, which means "broken." Meaning, the leader should be one with a broken heart, one who is concerned for his people, not arrogant; a person who will feel and understand the needs of the people.

FROM AMONG THE PEOPLE

Reb Simchah Bunim of Pshischa

"So that the assembly of Hashem should not be like sheep without their shepherd..." (27:17)

Moshe pleaded with Hashem that the chosen leader should not be aristocratic but like a shepherd, a plain person. Hashem should choose a leader from the common people.

WITH THE PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"Who will take the Jewish people out and bring them in, so that the assembly of Hashem should not be like sheep without their shepherd..." (27:17)

When Moshe is told that he will soon pass away, his first concern is to solicit G-d to appoint someone to take over as leader of the people (27:16). Moshe asks for someone who will "lead the Jewish people out and bring them in, so that G-d's congregation should not be like sheep without their shepherd" (27:17). Why use the possessive "their"; why not say "like sheep without a shepherd"?

Rav Yaakov Meir Schechter asks why Moshe phrased it as if the sheep possess "their" shepherd, and explains that Moshe intentionally requested a leader that was part of the people, who would not only lead them but also have the capacity to relate to them and advocate on their behalf.

Moshe demonstrates two critical components of effective leadership: (1) thinking selflessly about others as he advocates for his successor even though he himself will not benefit, and (2) intimately understanding the plight and struggles of the people he leads and represents.

SHEPHERD AND THE TZADDIK

Sefas Emes

“So that the assembly of Hashem should not be like sheep without their shepherd...” (27:17)

The true shepherd of Israel is Hashem, may He be blessed, as Dovid HaMelech (Tehillim 23:1) said, “Hashem is my shepherd; I shall not lack.” Unfortunately, not everyone recognizes it, nor do many sense it.

The function of the Tzaddik or leader is to educate us that there is an Almighty, Who is concerned for the Jew and is His guardian, especially in difficult times. However, when the Jewish people do not have the proper leaders who will reveal that Hashem is there for them, then the people will develop the feeling that Hashem has abandoned them and that there is no Shepherd.

That was Moshe’s intention when he said to Hashem, “May Hashem... appoint a man over the assembly, who shall go out before them and come in before them...” Hashem should appoint a leader who would assist them in knowing that there is a Shepherd and they should not feel as if there is, G-d forbid, no Shepherd.

ASSERTIVE HUMILITY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“G-d said to Moshe, ‘Take Yehoshua son of Nun, a man of spirit, and lay your hand upon him.’” (27:18)

Yehoshua was chosen as Moshe’s successor by virtue of his consummate diligence in absorbing Moshe’s instruction - both from the Torah that Moshe taught and through Moshe’s personal conduct. The difference in their leadership was that Moshe’s was largely based on miracles whereas Yehoshua’s was conducted naturally. Therefore, it was specifically through Yehoshua’s leadership that the purpose of Creation - to sanctify the natural, mundane world - was fulfilled. But Yehoshua succeeded only because he was a selfless reflection of Moshe; his selflessness enabled the miraculous nature of Moshe’s leadership to carry over into his own, natural leadership. Thus, Yehoshua’s first conquest, the city of Yericho, occurred miraculously.

From Yehoshua we learn to be fully committed both to humbly absorbing and transmitting the heritage and lessons of the Torah as they have been handed down to us by our predecessors, and to applying the Torah’s teachings to the novel situations of our generation. (Hitva’aduyot 5747, vol. 3, pp. 191-195) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

THE TZADDIK - A MAN OF SPIRIT

Rebbe Nachman

“G-d said to Moshe, ‘Take Yehoshua son of Nun, a man of spirit, and lay your hand upon him.’” (27:18)

“A man in whom there is spirit” can resonate to the spirit of every individual. (Rashi)

This is the tzaddik, who knows the correct response for each individual and can draw down the spirit of life to him. (See Likutey Moharan I, 8:2)

Because the tzaddik is the spiritual source of all souls, he has the spirit to see each person as an individual. (II, 72)

He can arouse the spirit and mind within each individual. (ibid., I, 29:2)

The tzaddik has a uniquely great spirit, which is a form of a spirit of prophecy. Therefore he is chosen to be a leader. (ibid., I, 8:8)

The tzaddik possesses the spirit to overcome idolatry and haughtiness. (ibid., I, 10:5)

Sometimes, when a fire is about to burn out, the wind catches the embers and the flame begins to glow again. So too, the spirit of the tzaddik can “catch the embers” of a soul weighed down by depression and rekindle its joy and desire for G-d. (ibid., II, 9)

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Chida

“You shall place some of your honor upon him...” (27:20)

The text reads “some of your honor,” not “all of your honor.” The elders of that generation said: “Moshe’s countenance is like the sun’s face, and Yehoshua’s countenance is like the moon’s face. Oh, the disgrace of it! Oh, the shame of it!” (Bava Basra 75)

What is the shame and disgrace that the elders so deplore?

According to the Midrash, the reason Yehoshua was deemed worthy of becoming the Jews’ leader after Moshe was because, while Moshe was alive, Yehoshua always acted as his servant (“and Yehoshua son of Nun, the servant of Moshe”), arranging the seats in the house of study and sweeping the floor there, so that it could be said of him: “He who cares for the fig tree will eat of its fruit.”

The elders had been ashamed to perform these menial tasks. But now, when they saw that Yehoshua had become the people’s leader precisely because he had been willing to do this work, and that his “countenance shone like the moon,” they all cried out: “Alas for that foolish pride of ours that kept us from cleaning the house of study, for now we must endure the shame and the disgrace in our old age of having to be the disciples of this young Yehoshua.”

NOURISHING PRAYERS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“My offering, My food for My fires, My satisfying aroma, you shall keep watch to offer to Me in its appointed time.” (28:2)

G-d calls the sacrifices His daily “food,” for just as food sustains the body, so did the sacrifices draw sustaining Divine life-force into the world. Furthermore, the constancy of the daily sacrifices expressed the eternal bond between G-d and the Jewish people.

The daily prayers were instituted to parallel the daily sacrifices and to substitute for them in the absence of the Tabernacle or Temple. Thus, our daily prayers also “sustain” G-d.

If we ever doubt how important our prayers can be, we should recall that G-d considers them vital to the world’s existence and maintenance. They are as important to Him as our daily bread is to us. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 13, pp. 103-104) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

AWARENESS AND PURPOSE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“My offering, My food for My fires, My satisfying aroma, you shall keep watch to offer to Me in its appointed time.” (28:2)

G-d had responded to Moshe’s request for a successor by telling him to appoint Yehoshua for this position. G-d’s subsequent instructions regarding the daily and holiday communal sacrifices were a further response to Moshe’s request.

This is because the need for a physical, human leader is part of our need to recognize that our lives - and indeed, the world in general - are not undirected and purposeless. Therefore, after providing them with a human leader, G-d ensured that the people always recognize that they are subject to Him, their Divine leader - that He runs the world and that all aspects of life occur through Divine providence. G-d accomplished this by instituting the daily and holiday communal sacrifices, which served to remind us that G-d is constantly present in our daily lives.

Our daily and holiday prayers correspond to the daily and holiday sacrifices, and substitute for them in their absence. Their purpose, too, is to enhance our awareness and recognition that the world is not subject merely to the blind laws of nature, but that there is also a G-d in the world, directing it toward its goal and giving it purpose. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

SACRIFICING CRAVINGS

Reb Noson of Breslov

“Say to them, ‘This is the fire-offering that you should offer to G-d: two unblemished yearling sheep each day as a daily sacrifice.’” (28:3)

The *Olat tamid* (עולת תמיד, daily sacrifice) was meant to counter the *Tola’at* (תולעת, worm) that consumes and destroys everything in its path. One who feels pursued and trapped by materialism, yet strengthens himself to draw close to G-d, can transform his *Tola’at* into *Olat*, a sacrifice that is offered daily to G-d.

REVEALED MYSTERIES

Rebbe Nachman

“Prepare one sheep in the morning and the second sheep in the afternoon.” (28:4)

Keves (כבש, sheep) is similar to *Kavshei d’Rachamana* (כבשי דרחמנא, mysteries of the Merciful One). Through the daily sacrifices - and their modern-day analogue, the daily prayers - the Torah’s mysteries are revealed. (See Likutei Moharan I, 44:7)

KEEPING IT FRESH

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“The continual olah-offering will be done as [it was on] Har Sinai, as a satisfying aroma, a fire to G-d” (28:6)

The Torah details the offerings, beginning with the daily sacrifices (28:1-8) and continuing with the Shabbos and special occasion offerings (28:9-15). Nestled in the instructions for the daily offering is the phrase that “the continual offering will be done as [it was on] Har Sinai, as a smell of satisfaction, a fire to G-d” (28:6). Considering that the daily offering was previously instructed, what does this pasuk add that we did not already know?

Rav Yosef Tzvi Salant suggests that the nuance in this commandment is for the daily offering to be offered as if it was the first time it was offered on Sinai, with the same enthusiasm, concentration, and intent.

Daily actions can become mindless acts if we are not careful to keep their intentions fresh in our minds. Smell and fire are two elements of nature that affect their surroundings without diminishing themselves. Keeping our mundane acts fresh creates a positive environment for growth that is contagious.

A PLEASING FIRE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Prepare the second sheep in the afternoon with the same meal-offering and libation as you prepared in the morning. It is a fire-offering, an appeasing fragrance to G-d.” (28:8)

The Maggid of Mezeritch interpreted the final phrase of this verse as follows:

When a person serves G-d - either through prayer, studying the Torah, or performing some commandment - with “a fire offering,” i.e., with warmth and enthusiasm, it is “pleasing to G-d.” - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

BURNING DESIRE

Rebbe Nachman

“Prepare the second sheep in the afternoon with the same meal-offering and libation as you prepared in the morning. It is a fire-offering, an appeasing fragrance to G-d.” (28:8)

A person who burns with a desire for G-d creates a spiritual fire – “a fire-offering, an appeasing fragrance” – that brings G-d satisfaction. However, he must be wary of his fiery passion and make sure that it is not the fire of his evil inclination – which is “a foreign fire that He had not commanded them to bring” (Vayikra 10:1). (See Likutey Moharan I, 41:1)

BUILD THEM UP

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“And one male of the goats for a sin offering to Hashem, in addition to the elevation offering, shall it be made and its libations.” (28:15)

The Torah obligates us to bring a male goat as a special *korban* (sacrifice) on Rosh Chodesh.

Rashi comments that the reason that we brought this special *korban* was to serve as an atonement for Hashem for having reduced the size of the moon during creation.

Rashi’s explanation seems difficult to understand. What kind of “wrong” did Hashem commit? Additionally, didn’t Hashem reduce the moon in response to the moon’s concern that the sun and the moon can’t share the one crown, as the Medrash states?

I heard a beautiful suggestion from Rabbi Philip Moskowitz that while Hashem accepted the moon’s complaint that the sun and moon could not coexist as equal, Hashem could have simply enlarged the sun without reducing the size of the moon. Instead, Hashem chose to make the moon smaller and keep the sun the same size. Hashem’s “transgression” was that He could have built up the sun without knocking down the moon, but He didn’t. [Of course, we can say that Hashem acted in this manner as a lesson for all generations to learn from.]

We can learn a very important lesson from Rashi. At times, we are confronted with the choice to build someone up or knock someone down. We find ourselves making quick decisions that have far-reaching consequences without taking into consideration all the factors. Rashi is teaching us that when the choice of building someone up or knocking someone down is placed before us, we should choose the second option and build them up. Not only will it help the person grow more, but it will help us ensure that we create positive environments for our families and communities!

CHARITABLE FAVOR

Reb Noson of Breslov

“On the fourteenth day of the first month will be a Pesach sacrifice to G-d.” (28:16)

Divine Favor is revealed on the Festivals, since they commemorate the miracles G-d did for the Jewish people when they left Egypt.

This Divine Favor invokes joy. And the main joy on the Festivals is invoked by the sacrifices, which connote charity. Thus, charity invokes Divine Favor. (Likutey Halakhot VII, p. 119a)

FIERY ASCENT

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

“And you shall offer a fire offering, an ascent offering to Hashem.” (28:19)

This verse implies that if the way we approach G-d is “fire,” i.e., is characterized by fiery enthusiasm to accept G-d as our King with awe, and with great fire, there will be “an ascent to G-d [Havayah],” meaning that there will be an ascent for the Name Havayah.

(The word for “you shall offer up” [והקרבתם] can be read “you shall draw close,” the word for “burnt offering” [אשה] literally means simply “fire,” and the word for “ascent offering” [עולה] literally means simply “ascending.” Thus, the phrase “You shall offer up a burnt offering, an ascent offering to G-d” can be read, “[If] you draw close [to G-d] with fire, [you will cause the Name] Havayah [to ascend].” This is necessary because during the exile, G-d’s Name Havayah is, so to speak, diminished (see Rashi on Shemos 17:16).)

As it is written (Tehillim 20:6), “G-d will fulfill [literally, ‘fill’] all your longed-for requests.” This verse implies, on a deeper level, that all our requests should be to “fill” – i.e., restore the greatness of – G-d’s Name Havayah. (The phrase “G-d will fulfill your longed-for requests” can, in light of this teaching, be interpreted to mean, “All your longed-for requests should be that [the Name] Havayah be filled [i.e., made great].”)

Another explanation: This verse tells us that if we wish to offer up a burnt offering of fear and ardor to G-d, “it must be an ascent offering to G-d,” which means that we must ensure that it be raised up entirely to G-d, meaning that it not be distant from G-d; it must be free of any sense that we are separate from G-d, and free of any admixture of fear or ardor for anything else, G-d forbid.

Rather, it should be an undiluted feeling of camaraderie with G-d and a desire to cling to Him, all without any thought of reward.

Another explanation of this verse: The word for “burnt offering” [אשה] can also be read “woman” [אשה]. Thus, this verse implies that our offering should be intended to be “feminine,” i.e., given with the intent to receive. Indeed, G-d created us in order to give to us.

However, after we receive from Him and serve Him with what He has bestowed upon us, this causes an elevation - “for G-d,” meaning that His Name is exalted throughout all worlds by the holy Jewish people who crown Him as King even over the lowly, physical earth. How much more so, then, is He crowned as King in the higher worlds.

(If the Jewish people declare G-d to be King even over the physical world, which appears to be self-sufficient and therefore inimical to Divine consciousness, then the upper worlds, which are inherently aware of G-d’s existence and providence, must all the more so declare Him King.)

FIERY PASSION

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“And you shall offer a fire offering, an ascent offering to Hashem.” (28:19)

The Kedushas Levi offers an additional insight into this pasuk. He explains that if one grows close to Hashem with passion and fire - *v’hikravtem ishe*, then Hashem will be elevated as a result - *olah la’Hashem*.

Another suggestion is that if we serve Hashem with energy and enthusiasm, then we will ascend to high levels of spirituality in our connection to Hashem.

One can’t serve Hashem without emotion and excitement, operating by rote and routine. Instead, if a person wants to develop and maintain a strong and deep connection to Hashem, the fire and passion of Torah and mitzvos has to burn within them. Let us intensify our commitment and devotion to fulfilling the words of Hashem so that we can elevate those around us and ourselves.

FIRST FRUITS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“On the day of the first fruits, when you offer up a new grain-offering to G-d, your [festival] of weeks...” (28:26)

Allegorically, the term “first fruits” refers to the souls of the Jewish people, who are called “the first of His produce” (Yirmiyahu 2:3) because they were the first entity to arise in G-d’s thought before He created the world (Bereishis Rabbah 1:4) - meaning that He created the rest of the world (including the Torah itself) in their merit.

This is why Shavuot, the holiday on which we re-experience the Giving of the Torah, is called “the day of the first fruits.” The renewal of the Giving of the Torah is accomplished by the Jewish people, on behalf of all

humanity (see Eichah Rabbah 2:13). The Torah on its own cannot accomplish G-d’s purposes in the world; only we, using the Torah as our guide, are able to bring the world to its true completion and perfection. (Hitva’aduyot 5713, vol. 2, pp. 213-216) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

SPECIFIC SACRIFICES

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“On the day of the first fruits, when you offer up a new grain-offering to G-d, your [festival] of weeks, you must celebrate a holy occasion; you must not perform any mundane work.” (28:26)

Parashas Pinchas describes the different sacrifices offered for each of the major holidays. While most of this is repetitive, there are variations worth noting. While the offerings for the last six days of Pesach are identical (28:16-25), the offerings for Sukkos change daily (29:12-38). The sacrifices for Shavuot are different in that they include a unique offering of the season’s first fruits (28:26-31). Why are there differences in sacrifices, and what is their significance?

Rabbi Berel Wein explains that because Pesach represents only one set of events, its sacrifices are repeated, helping us focus on the singularity of the exodus itself. On the other hand, Sukkos represents G-d’s oversight and our dealing with daily life, thus requiring a modified approach and varied individualized focus. That’s why the sacrifices change daily, mirroring the course of life. The third variation is that of Shavuot, when we offer up a new meal offering from the first fruit of the land, highlighting our ability to use resources around us, create positivity, and give selflessly with different means at our disposal.

DAY OF FORGIVENESS

Rebbe Nacham

“The first day of the seventh month will be a holy festival for you...” (29:1)

Out of His great compassion for us, G-d established Rosh HaShanah, the New Year, on Rosh Chodesh, the day of the New Moon. (Indeed, Rosh HaShanah is the only holiday that falls on Rosh Chodesh.)

The sin-offering for Rosh Chodesh is unique among sin-offerings brought on special occasions, as it is described as being “to G-d” (Bamidbar 28:15). This phrase may be understood as having a special meaning: Not only is this sin-offering offered to G-d, but it is offered on behalf of G-d-because, as it were, on Rosh Chodesh, G-d Himself requests forgiveness for having diminished the size of the moon (Chullin 60b).

Thus, because G-d asks forgiveness on that day, we can boldly ask Him for forgiveness as well, even though Rosh HaShanah is a day of strict judgment. (See Likutey Moharan II, 1:14)

RENEWED RELATIONSHIP

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“The first day of the seventh month... it will be a day of shofar-sounding for you.” (29:1)

Annual renewal is necessary if life is to retain its freshness and novelty. If we merely continue cultivating the same type of Divine consciousness, we will remain locked in its limitations, ultimately making our religious lives seem repetitious and dull.

Rosh HaShanah is an opportunity for us to make a quantum leap to a new plateau of Divine consciousness that will inspire our lives for the coming year.

To accomplish this, however, we cannot rely on the words of our prayers, because words carry specific meanings for us that are limited by the knowledge and experiences we have accrued in our lives. In order to break out of our limited modes of expression, we use the blasts and wails of the shofar, which transcend the confines of verbal language. In this way, we recapture the innocence and inspiration of a newly born soul and of the Jewish people when they received the Torah at Har Sinai. This renewed inspiration invigorates our relationship with G-d for the coming year. (Sefer HaMa’amarim Melukat, vol. 1, p. 426)
- Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

G-d sent our Divine soul into the foreign environment of this material world for its own edification, which we accomplish by studying the Torah and fulfilling its commandments. But by indulging in the delights of this world, we become increasingly estranged from our Divine soul’s native environment. We are drawn further and further into a world that is not concerned with Divinity, and we eventually all but forget about holiness and purity.

But at some point, we remember who we are and we cry out to G-d. This is the wordless blast of the shofar, which utters the innermost voice of our soul in our remorse over its failings, our longing for its Divine home, and our desire to rededicate ourselves to our higher purpose. When G-d hears this cry, it arouses His mercy, and He forgives us, restoring us to our former intimacy with Him.

Rosh HaShanah is thus a time of renewal, of returning to our source and drawing new levels of connection from the inexhaustible wellsprings of our relationship with G-d. (Torat Shmuel 5637 (Vechachah) 80) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

KEEP IT SIMPLE

Reb Noson of Breslov

“The first day of the seventh month... it will be a day of shofar-sounding for you.” (29:1)

When we blow the shofar, first we blow a simple sound (tekiah), then a staccato sound of nine notes (teruah), and then a tekiah once again.

Teruah (תְּרוּעָה, shofar-blowing) implies the Torah, as its letters can be rearranged to spell Torah Ayin (תורה ע), indicating the “seventy faces of Torah” (the letter ayin [ע] has the numerical value of 70). The Torah was given only after the shofar was sounded (Shemos 19:16), teaching that one cannot attain the Torah unless he has both the tekiah and the teruah - i.e., he conducts himself with simplicity both before and after his Torah study.

Similarly, on Rosh HaShanah, we blow the tekiah, a simple sound, before and after the teruah.

ENLIGHTENING THE WORLD

Reb Noson of Breslov

“You should offer a burnt-offering, a fire-offering, as an appeasing fragrance to G-d: thirteen bulls, two rams, and fourteen yearling lambs, all unblemished.” (29:13)

The seventy bulls brought as sacrifices on the seven days of Sukkot were an atonement for the sins of the seventy nations. (Rashi on Bamidbar 29:18)

The sacrifices were brought in the following order: On the first day of Sukkot, thirteen bulls; on the second day, twelve bulls; on the third day, eleven bulls; and so forth, until seven bulls were brought on the seventh day. Each day, the number of sacrifices diminished by one - this is related to the power of the Torah, which can reach even those who are furthest from G-d.

On the first day, we bring thirteen bulls, corresponding to the Thirteen Exegetical Principles by which the Torah is interpreted - this represents those Jews who have some Torah knowledge.

On the second day, we bring twelve bulls, which represent those Jews who have less knowledge and therefore are more distant from G-d.

On the third day, we bring eleven bulls, corresponding to those Jews who possess even less Torah knowledge and are even more distant from G-d - and so on throughout the rest of the days of Sukkot.

For our main mission is to enlighten the world with the knowledge of G-d, which manifests through the knowledge of Torah. (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 149a)

JOY IN SELF-DISCIPLINE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“One young he-goat as a sin-offering, besides the continual ascent-offering, its grain-offering, and its libation.” (29:16)

The difference between wine and water is that whereas the former has a distinct flavor and acts as a stimulant, the latter is bland. Accordingly, wine corresponds to our understanding of our Divine mission - the intellectual and emotional motivation that spurs us to pray, study the Torah, or perform G-d’s commandments with joy and enthusiasm.

Water, in contrast, corresponds to raw discipline, the devotion to G-d that we muster in order to persevere when intellectual or emotional motivation fails us, or to persist beyond the extent to which they drive us.

Nevertheless, we are told that the joy that accompanied the ceremony of drawing the water for the Sukkot water-libation exceeded that of all other celebrations (Sukkah 51b). The unbounded joy that accompanied the water-libation reflected the unbounded nature of raw discipline. Our intellect and emotions are limited by our mental acuity and emotional sensitivity. Discipline, in contrast, is unlimited; our devotion to G-d is rooted in the essential connection between Him and our Divine souls, and it is therefore not subject to any limitations. Our renewed realization of this unassailable connection to G-d is what powers the unparalleled outpouring of joy accompanying the water-libation. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 2, pp. 419-421)

MUTUAL JOY

Reb Noson of Breslov

“On the eighth day, it shall be a withholding for you; you shall not do any work of labor.” (29:35)

[After the festival of Sukkot,] G-d says to the Jews, “Remain with Me another day.” (cf. Rashi)

On the Festival of Sukkot, we rejoice in G-d. The Festival of Shemini Atzeret, coming the day after Sukkot, represents G-d’s joy in us. Coming full circle, joy is perfected on this day. We rejoice with G-d and He rejoices with us. (Likutei Halakhot VII, p. 294)

PERSONAL AND PUBLIC NEEDS

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“On the eighth day, it shall be a withholding for you; you shall not do any work of labor.” (29:35)

The Torah details the offerings for Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot, and Shemini Atzeret. Rashi explains why Shemini Atzeret was placed after Sukkot: Immediately following seven days where offers were presented on behalf of the rest of the world, it was essential to have a day of quiet reflection. Why were offerings brought on behalf of the rest of the world, and why was there a day of reflection expressly set after those offerings?

Rav Moshe Feinstein (Darash Moshe) explains that the world was created so that people and countries would need each other and therefore need to interact with one another. That’s why some regions have specific natural resources and why people have different strengths.

To create a balanced and peaceful world, we must accept responsibility for helping others in any way we can. However, to avoid getting caught up in our activities and forgetting the ultimate purpose, G-d asks us to take a day (Shemini Atzeret) to refocus ourselves on the purpose of our actions. This way, we will not only act harmoniously but do so with purpose.

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