

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“May the Lord G-d of the spirits of all flesh appoint a leader over the witness community...” (Numbers 27:15) After the Almighty commands Moses to ascend Mount Abarim (Mount Nebo) and gaze at the Land of Israel - to which he had been denied entry because he struck the rock - Moses proposes: "Let the Lord, G-d of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a person over the community who will go out before them, come in before them, and who will lead them out and bring them in." The Almighty responds: "Take for yourself Joshua the son of Nun, a person in whom there is spirit, and rest your hand upon him..." (Numbers 27:12-18).

It is fascinating that Moses refers to the Almighty as the "G-d of the spirits of all flesh." Rashi sees this as a ringing endorsement of pluralism - the necessity of a leader to be sensitive to different attitudes and ideas: "[Moses] said before Him, Master of the Universe, it is clear to You that each individual's understanding is different from that of their counterparts. Appoint over them a leader who will be tolerant of everyone, each in accordance with his understanding" [Rashi, ad loc].

Rashi's commentary is based on the Midrash Tanhuma and B.T. Brachot 58a, which link this idea to the rabbinic enactment that if one sees a gathering of 600,000 Jews or more, one is to recite the blessing "Praised be G-d, the Wise One of Mysteries." For just as the facial features of each individual are different, so are their mind-sets.

Rabbi A.Y. Kook, the first chief rabbi of Israel, explains: "And in accordance with the secret mysteries known and revealed only to the Almighty, Praised be He, even antithetical notions may be joined together and synthesized, until a harmonious result emerges from the combination of different ideas ... Their views do not begin as convergent, but ultimately the different strains and strands will merge as one. And it is certain that this ultimate unity is not evident from the beginning, because then the dispute as well as the fine-tuning of the differences would not continue... And so we are

taught by the Talmudic sages: 'scholars increase peace in the world.' The word "increase" is a plural form (marbim); through the multiplicity of ideas in a dispute for the sake of heaven, an ultimate peace and unity can be formed" [Olat Reiya].

Rabbi Kook, Rashi and the Midrash all explain the phrase "G-d of the spirits of all flesh" as referring to differences of opinion not only in Halacha - as expressions of "these and those are the words of the living G-d" [B.T. Eruvin 13b]. Just as we preserve minority opinions in halachic discourse because they may become admissible, and even vital, so too in the realm of beliefs, opinions and attitudes.

Contemporary Judaism is a great deal richer as a result of the differing approaches of hassidim and mitnagdim. Even secular and antinomian forms of Judaism have contributed rituals which have become integrated within more traditional expressions of our faith, such as the bat mitzva, preaching sermons in the vernacular, and the synthesis between Judaism and socialism which characterizes the religious kibbutz.

A perfect and ultimate unity, a true synthesis, can only emerge from the creative tension which is a by-product of a clash of ideals and opinions. What has all this to do with leadership? Moses asks G-d that his successor be sensitive to the "manifold spirits of all flesh"; that Moses' replacement not lead as a despot who silences all differing voices, but rather as a conductor who produces harmonious euphony from distinct instruments. The leader must recognize that what unites is much more significant than what divides, and so his major task is to unify without squelching individual creativity. He must produce unity but not uniformity, harmony but not a monotone.

If only all Jews would work together for the sake of the entire Jewish people and the State of Israel, because "all the gates to heaven are gates of holiness." These are the immortal words of the Hatam Sofer, who saw differing versions - nus'haot - of prayers and different time-honored customs as harking back to the varied tapestries or "flags" of each of the 12 tribes.

If only our rabbinic leadership would understand that kashrut is supposed to unite our people rather than divide us. And if only we would all learn to love and respect the other, rather than to fear, delegitimize and de-humanize. After all, the truest Other is the Almighty Himself, to whom we must cleave, and whom we must emulate. © 2011 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

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for a refuah shelaima

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RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

Sefer Bamidbar begins with the census taken towards the beginning of the 2nd year that the Children of Israel lived in the desert. Our Parasha details the census taken in the 40th year, shortly before the nation entered the Promised Land. One of the differences between these two censuses is the delineation of each family. Whereas only the names of the Tribes are given in the earlier census, this time the names of each of the families of each Tribe are listed as well. Rashi (Bamidbar 26:24) tells us that a "family" (the definition of which affected how the land was divided, see 26:53) was determined by those who descended with Yaakov to Egypt. The Torah (Beraishis 46:8-27) lists the "70 souls" who went down to Egypt; each of these became a "family head" whose descendants were defined as a "family."

This formulation works for most of the Tribes, but cannot apply to the descendants of Yosef, as they were already in Egypt when the rest of the Children of Israel joined them there. Instead, the "families" of Menashe and Efrayim are based on the three generations of descendants that Yosef saw (see Beraishis 50:23, Bamidbar Rabbah 14:5, Midrash Agada and Beraishis Rabasi). For the other Tribes, a comparison of the names of those that went down to Egypt should match the names of the families given in the census in our Parasha. For the most part, this is true, especially if you take into account slight variations in the names of some of the families, variations explained by the commentators. There are some "families" that are missing, i.e. names of people that went down to Egypt that do not have a corresponding "family" in the census. Rashi (Bamidbar 26:13), based on the Talmud Yerushalmi (Yoma 1:1), explains that these families were "lost" during a civil war that erupted after Aharon's death. The exception to this formulation, although not mentioned by Rashi, was the Tribe of Levi.

Levi had three children, and they are his only descendants listed among those that went down to Egypt (Beraishis 46:11). Yet, there are eight families of Levi'im (five if his sons aren't considered separate families) mentioned in our Parasha (Bamidbar 26:57-58). Sha'aray Aharon asks how Amram could be

mentioned, since he was born well after the Children of Israel moved to Egypt. I'm not sure why he focuses on Amram, or has to bring proof that Amram was born in Egypt, since all Levi'im besides Levi and his three sons were born after Yaakov and his family left Canaan. Additionally, there is no "Amram family" mentioned here. Although we are told that Amram was the son of Levi's son Kehas (26:58), and that he was the father of Moshe, Aharon and Miriam (26:59), he is not included in the list of "families." Nevertheless, the issue raised is valid; the "rule" is that in order to be considered a "family," there must be a corresponding "head of the family" that moved from Canaan to Egypt with Yaakov. How can the Tribe of Levi have more than three families if only three other Levi'im were around when Yaakov left Canaan?

Sha'aray Aharon, referencing Rambam (Hilchos Avodah Zarah 1:3), suggests that since the Tribe of Levi was appointed by Yaakov to study (and teach) Torah, it was considered as if they never left Canaan, allowing Levi's grandchildren and great-grandchildren to qualify as "heads of family." [Sha'aray Aharon doesn't explain why only these Levi'im qualified, and not more. It's possible that the three generation limit corresponded to how many generations of Yosef's descendants qualified. It's also possible that this equation of learning Torah being the same as still being in Canaan was only true while Yaakov was still alive (perhaps because their Torah study wasn't same afterwards). Additionally, being considered a "family" likely needed the additional qualification of having a large enough family to be considered a distinct "family," which subsequent generations may not have had.]

Although the census at the beginning of Sefer Bamidbar does not mention "families" for any of the other Tribes, it does mention eleven families for the Tribe of Levi (Bamidbar 3:17-37). "Families" are also mentioned when Moshe and Aharon are introduced (Shemos 6:16-25), with even more names mentioned (although not all of them are described as "families"). When Rashi quotes the Yerushalmi (Bamidbar 26:13), he contrasts the number of families of Levi'im listed in the first census in Sefer Bamidbar with the amount of families in our Parasha. It would therefore seem that this earlier census is the reference point for being considered a "family" for the Tribe of Levi, not earlier. It was for that earlier census that Levi was differentiated from everyone else, being "counted" from a month old (Bamidbar 3:15) rather than from 20 years old (1:3). Rashi (1:59) tells us that this was done purposely, so that when the decree is made that no one "counted from 20 years and up" can enter the Promised Land, the Tribe of Levi wouldn't be included. They had distinguished themselves in the aftermath of the sin of the "golden calf" (Shemos 32:26), making it extremely likely that this was the reference point that determined which families of Levi'im qualified as "families." Since the Tribe of Levi was "separated" from the rest of the

nation after the exodus from Egypt (at the earlier census, which was the "starting point" of their new status), there is no issue with the "families" mentioned in our Parasha corresponding to "heads of family" that were born in Egypt. © 2011 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

One way that people attempt to attain transcendence is by guiding their children on the path they began. Even Moshe (Moses), who was first and foremost committed to the nation of Israel and was the most humble of men, was hopeful that his own children would complete the mission he started and lead the people into Israel.

Hence, the Midrash notes, (See Rashi 27:16) it was after God permitted the daughters of Zelofhad to inherit from their father, (27:1-11) that Moshe makes the request of God that a successor be appointed in the hope that his sons would be tapped for leadership.

It was not to be. The Talmud points out that Torah leadership is not automatically inherited. (Nedarim 71a) This principle is seen as God tells Moshe that none of his children will lead the people, rather Yehoshua (Joshua) will be the next leader of the nation. (Numbers 27:18) Moshe transfers the reigns to Yehoshua. Several lessons can be learned from the way Moshe passes on his position.

First: Although it was not to be transmitted to his sons as he had wished, Moshe transfers the power to Yehoshua with great support and kindness. Whereas God told Moshe to "lay your hand (in the singular) on him [Yehoshua]," (27:18) Moshe places both hands on him. (27:23) Rashi makes this point by maintaining that Moshe laid his hands on Yehoshua "generously, in much greater measure than he was commanded."

Second: Whereas God tells Moshe to "put some of his honor upon him [Yehoshua]," (Numbers 27:20) there is no mention that Moshe does so. Perhaps Moshe's humble side felt that he was unworthy to act in such a way-only God can give such honor. Alternatively, Moshe wanted Yehoshua to do it his way. While Moshe had given Yehoshua a sound foundation, Moshe understood that every leader is blessed with a unique style. Yehoshua should not become Moshe's clone-he should develop his own way, his own honor.

Third: Moshe genuinely desires that Yehoshua receive a better lot than he did. Hence, Moshe tells God that the new leader be able "to lead them out, and...bring them in." (Numbers 27:17) This, according to the Midrash, means that Moshe hoped that unlike himself, the next leader would not only be permitted to begin his task by moving the Jews out, but also be allowed to conclude his mission by taking the people into the land of Israel. (Bamidbar Rabbah 21:16) Even Moshe could not do it all. Yehoshua would complete

that which Moshe started, that which even Moshe could not complete.

It's not easy to step back and make space for someone else. This is especially the case vis-à-vis our children. When someone else is given precedence over one's own child it presents an especially challenging situation, especially when one is in a position of power and is as Moshe was, the prophet of prophets.

But Moshe did all of this, and did so nobly. The most humble person ever to live was without envy and graciously transferred power to the other. In doing so he once again showed his great strength and unbridled selflessness. © 2011 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and President of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School - the Modern and Open Orthodox Rabbinical School. He is Senior Rabbi at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, a Modern and Open Orthodox congregation of 850 families. He is also National President of AMCHA - the Coalition for Jewish Concerns.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Torah records for us the genealogy of Pinchas, the true and justified zealot of Jewish history.

There are many reasons advanced as to why the Torah felt impelled to tell us of the names of his father and grandfather. Many commentators saw in this an explanation to justify Pinchas' behavior while others emphasized that it was an explanation for Pinchas' reward and God granting him the blessing of peace.

But aside from these insights there is another more general message that the Torah is recording for us. And that is that a person's behavior affects all of one's family members, even those of previous generations who may no longer be currently numbered among the living.

A great act of sanctification of God's name such as the one performed by Pinchas enhances the reputations and stature of previous generations as well. My rebbe in the yeshiva summed this lesson up in his usual concise and pithy manner: "If both your grandparents and your grandchildren are proud of you and your achievements then you are probably alright in Heaven's judgment as well."

Our idea of immortality is based upon generations of our families, both previous generations and later ones. We find vindication of our lives and efforts in the accomplishments of those that come after us and continue our values and faith. We cannot control what children and grandchildren will do, whom they will marry and what type of life they will lead. But innately, we feel that we have a connection to the development of their lives and the actions that they will take.

The Torah emphasizes for us that Pinchas' zealotry did not come to him in a vacuum. The Torah allows everyone freedom of will and behavior. Neither good behavior nor evil behavior is ever predestined. Yet as medicine has shown us, in the physical world there is

an element of physical predestination in our DNA. And this DNA affects our moral behavior as well.

Judaism always envisioned itself not only as a universal faith but as a particular family as well. In our daily prayer service we constantly recall who our founding ancestors were. We name our children in memory of those who have preceded us. We extol a sense of family and a loyalty to the values that our families represent.

One of the most destructive trends in modern society has been the erosion of the sense of family in the world and amongst Jews particularly. Assimilation means abandoning family and abandoning family certainly contributes to intensified assimilation and loss of Jewish feelings and identity. It is ironic that in a time such as now when most children can be privileged to know grandparents and even great grandparents the relationship between generations in many Jewish families is frayed and weak.

Pinchas comes therefore to reinforce this concept of tying generations - past, present and future - together. It is imperative for us to know Pinchas' genealogy for otherwise we have no clue as to who Pinchas was and why he behaved as he did in those given circumstances. © 2011 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL ZT"l

Translated by Kaeren Fish

“Pinchas son of Elazar son of Aharon, the kohen, turned back My anger from Bnei Yisrael, in his zeal for My sake among them, so that I did not destroy Bnei Yisrael in My zeal. Therefore say, Behold, I give him My covenant of peace.” (Bamidbar 25:11-12)

There are people who by nature are zealous. Such people are zealous about everything, in every sphere. There are people like this who are immersed in some type of extremism, and when they move over to a different ideology, they become just as extreme in that view. Some maintain that Pinchas had this sort of zeal in his personality. As Rashi explains: "The tribes scorned him, saying, 'Look at this one, whose mother's father used to fatten calves for idolatry-and he has killed a price of a tribe of Israel!' Therefore the text traces his lineage back to Aharon." (Based on Sanhedrin 82)

The text traces Pinchas's lineage back to Aharon-the same Aharon who, as we know, was a "lover of peace and pursuer of peace" (Avot 1:12). The Torah wants to tell us that Pinchas had not inherited his trait of zeal from Yitro, but rather from Aharon himself. Yitro was a figure who was altogether extreme: "There

was not a single form of idolatry which he had not practiced" (Mekhilta, Yitro). Yitro jumped from one religion to the next, diving into each with enthusiasm and extremism. Aharon, in contrast, was a personality who was altogether at peace, a personality altogether devoid of extremism. Nevertheless, it is precisely this sort of personality that sometimes arrives at an extremism that flows from truth, from spontaneous zeal for God.

Rambam writes: "One who is zealous is not permitted to harm [a Jew who lies with a gentile], except as the action is being performed, like Zimri, as it is written, "[the man of Israel] and the woman, through her belly" (Bamidbar 25:8). But if he had already separated himself, one does not kill him. And if one kills him, he himself is to be killed. And if one who is zealous comes to the court to ask permission to kill him, he is not given permission-even as the action is being performed." (Hilkhos Issurei Biah 12:5)

An act of zeal can only take place "as the action is being performed," and it can only emerge from true spontaneity (not after seeking permission or clarifying legal issues), out of true zeal for God.

In our generation the problem is that people are generally apathetic; nothing shakes their equilibrium. They view others desecrating Shabbat in public, and feel no twinge in their heart. Once I was in the United States and I saw a Christian priest on television, talking about "the Mother, the Son..." etc. I was completely shaken by this kind of talk. I couldn't listen to it. The people sitting in the room, though observant Jews, continued drinking their coffee, sensing nothing.

People become apathetic and nothing shocks them. We must feel zeal in certain areas. This does not mean that our zeal need necessarily be demonstrated outwardly-sometimes outward demonstrations only bring harm; one must know, from a halakhic point of view, when rebuke is necessary, when it is permissible, and when it is forbidden. However, all of that is only on the outside. Inside ourselves, we dare not remain apathetic. We must be zealous for God.

RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

What is the image that comes to mind when we think of the ideal national leader? Someone who has a grasp of the issues, who can see the big picture. Someone who is strong and courageous, who can hold his own in the arena of international affairs in times of war and peace. Someone who has a vision for the future and the ability to make it happen. Someone who, through his words and actions, can inspire and galvanize his people.

But in this week's Torah portion we find an altogether different measure of leadership. As the Jewish people approach the Promised Land, Hashem appoints Joshua as the successor to Moses. And what

is his qualification for leadership? That he is attuned to the spirit of each and every individual Jew.

The commentators explain that this is the overriding quality required of a leader. It is not enough for a leader to have grand schemes and plans. It is not enough for a leader to deliver soul-stirring addresses to the people. A leader must be able to relate to his people on every level. He must be sensitive to their needs and aspiration. He must empathize with their pain and joy. A true leader cannot stand off in the distance. He must be thoroughly attuned to the most minor requirements of his people in order to lead effectively. For a true leader, there are no little things.

For forty years, Moses had fulfilled this role. During all this time, as he enjoyed daily prophetic encounters with Hashem, Moses was constantly growing in holiness until he reached a point where he was, according to the Midrash, half human, half angel. Even so, whenever the people had challenged the divine will, he had fathomed their motivations and defended them. Even as he ascended from the mundane to the celestial, the gulf between him and his people had never widened to the point where he could not relate to them. Now that it was time for a change in leadership, Hashem chose Joshua who also excelled in his sensitivity to the nuances of each individual's spirit. This was the fundamental quality that Hashem wanted for a Jewish leader.

A revolutionary general was trying to revive the fighting spirit of his trapped and starving guerillas. "If we can fight our way out of this corner," he announced, "I will issue a large bonus to each man. You will have enough money to buy all the bread and meat and fruits and vegetables you need to recover your strength."

The guerillas responded to the promise. They fought like tigers and were able to break out and get away. As soon as they got to safer territory, the general, true to his word, awarded each man his bonus. The next day, the one of the general's aides stormed into his tent.

"Sir, a whole group of the men took their bonus money and wasted it!"

"Indeed?" said the general. "And what did they do?"

"Instead of buying food to rebuild their strength," the aide said furiously, "they spent all their money on tiny tins of caviar!"

The general stroked his chin thoughtfully for a few moments. "Thank you for telling me this," he said to his aide. "It is important information. This caviar must have been very important to them if they would spend all their money on it even when they are starving and exhausted. Apparently, the men need occasional splurges of luxury to help them deal with the tensions of battle. I will make sure to provide it for them in the future."

In our own lives, as we seek to grow spiritually, we must never lose sight of the physical needs of those

around us. A great sage once said, "My spiritual need is to serve the physical needs of others." There is profound spiritual fulfillment in bringing comfort and happiness to other people, even on the physical level. But in order to do so, we must be extremely sensitive and attuned, for as people are different from each other so are their needs. © 2011 Rabbi N. Reich & torah.org

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week begins a series of haftorah readings which reflect the inner feelings of the Jewish people during their final months of the year. The series consists of moving visions of the prophets depicting the pending Jewish exile and destruction of the Bais Hamikdash and concludes with an ongoing exchange between Hashem and the Jewish people expressing a strong desire for reunification. Our haftorah speaks about the introduction of Yirmiyahu into prophecy and shows him somewhat reluctant to serve as the leading prophet of Israel. Yirmiyahu's concern centered around his young age coupled with his lack of experience in speaking to an entire nation. He recognized the painful nature of his catastrophic predictions and feared that his prophetic words would actually endanger his own life. Hashem responded that He would personally direct Yirmiyahu and protect him from all opposing forces. Yirmiyahu consented and received his first prophecy which he described in the following words. "And Hashem sent His hand which touched my mouth and He said to me, 'Behold I've placed my words in your mouth.'" This unique description of prophecy as "words placed in the mouth", rather than words spoken to the prophet, suggest a strong dimension of force. It seems that Yirmiyahu actually felt compelled to speak his words of prophecy at all costs.

In truth, we find special significance given to the prophetic status of Yirmiyahu. Our Chazal (in Yalkut Shimoni 256) take note of the specific expression used by the Torah when introducing prophecy. In Parshas Shoftim (Devorim 18, 18) Hashem said to Moshe, "I shall establish a prophet amongst them likened to yourself. I shall place My words in his mouth and he will convey to the Jewish people everything I command." Chazal reflect upon the words, "prophet likened to yourself (Moshe)" used here which suggest a parallel between Moshe and other prophets. Chazal raise the question that the Torah unequivocally states that no one ever achieved parallel status of prophecy to that of Moshe Rabbeinu. What the nis meant by these words "a prophet likened to yourself"? Chazal answer that these words allude to the unique role of the prophet Yirmiyahu. They explain that there was a clear parallel between the role of Yirmiyahu as the prophet of rebuke and the role of Moshe Rabbeinu. They even draw lines between the life of Moshe Rabbeinu and that of

Yirmiyahu. They note that teach served a full term of forty years and was personally responsible for the ethical conduct of the entire nation. In addition, each of them faced serious opposition from their people for the hard stand they took in defending the name of Hashem. The Mahri Kra in support of this point (see comment to Yirmiyahu 1:9) adds that even the terminology used to describe their prophecy is of exact nature. The Torah refers to the prophecy of Moshe Rabbeinu and states, "I shall place My words in his mouth." Interestingly, this exact expression "I have placed My words in your mouth" is used when describing the prophecy of Yirmiyahu.

As we have now seen, the introduction of prophecy makes direct reference to the ultimate prophet of doom, Yirmiyahu. One could question the high priority that Yirmiyahu's prophecy occupies in the Torah. Why did Moshe Rabbeinu make reference to the prophet Yirmiyahu at the inception of prophecy and single him out from the other forty seven leading prophets? What was so significant about Yirmiyahu's dimension of rebuke that made it the prime focus of Moshe Rabbeinu's earliest discussion about prophecy?

In search for clarification of this point it is beneficial to study Moshe Rabbeinu's reflections on the establishment of prophecy. In Parshas Shoftim Moshe says, "Hashem will establish a prophet in response to all that you requested of him at Sinai on the day you received the Torah. You said, 'I can not continue hearing the direct voice of Hashem and will no longer risk perishing when seeing this great fire.'" "Hashem responded, 'I will establish a prophet likened to you and will place My words in his mouth.'" (D'vorim 18:16) The Ramban (ad loc.) explains that the Jewish people requested that Hashem transmit His messages to them through words of prophecy. They found it too difficult to listen directly to Hashem because of the intensity of His words and opted to hear them through the prophets. With this request they agreed to hear the clear words of the prophets regardless of the severity of their nature. Hashem, in effect, consented to the Jewish people's request for prophecy, reserving the right to address them in the strongest of terms. The Jewish people readily accepted this alternative in place of hearing Hashem's direct and piercing words.

We now have a clear perspective regarding Moshe Rabbeinu's hidden prediction to the Jews. In truth, during Moshe's era the Jewish people were fully willing to listen to his piercing words of prophecy. This was of course in place of an all too familiar and highly intensified experience of listening to the words of Hashem Himself. Yet in later generations when the Jews would stray from the path of Hashem this task would become extremely difficult. Now that the dreaded alternative of hearing directly from Hashem was far out of sight the Jewish people could be prone to silencing their prophets restricting them from conveying their penetrating messages. Moshe, therefore, warned them

at the outset that their agreement was eternally binding and that in later years Hashem would send them a prophet whose words of rebuke would be as piercing as those of Moshe Rabbeinu himself.

We can now appreciate the opening words of Yirmiyahu in which he portrayed himself as compelled to speak the word of Hashem. It was the unpleasant role of Yirmiyahu to predict, in the most vivid form, the Jewish exile and the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash. These tidings were so penetrating and dreadful that the Jewish people would react to them as if they had heard direct words from Hashem. Yirmiyahu sensed the intensity of his prophetic mission and felt as if Hashem Himself was speaking directly to the Jewish people. He therefore expressed that Hashem placed words in the prophets mouth and delivered them directly to the Jewish people. In this regard Yirmiyahu was truly likened to Moshe Rabbeinu through whom Hashem delivered the clearest of messages to His people.

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RABBI YISROEL CINER

Parsha Insights

“**A**nd Hashem spoke to Moshe saying: Pinchas son of Elazar son of Aharon the Kohen, turned back my wrath from Bnei Yisroel {the Children of Israel} by zealously avenging My vengeance in their midst so that I did not consume Bnei Yisroel in My vengeance. [25:10-11]”

At the end of last week's parsha, Pinchas acted courageously and zealously to stop an unabashed act of immorality from being performed publicly. By doing this, he stopped the plague that had been sent against Bnei Yisroel.

This event of Bnei Yisroel succumbing to the temptations offered by the daughters of Moav followed Bilaam's stymied attempt to place a curse on Bnei Yisroel. The Ohr Gedalyahu illustrates how tightly these events were interwoven. The Talmud [Brachos 7A] teaches that Bilaam had the ability to determine the moment of Hashem's anger. His plan was to curse Bnei Yisroel with a plea for their destruction at precisely that moment. Hashem showed tremendous kindness by not having that moment of anger during the time that Bilaam was attempting to curse. This prompted Bilaam to apologetically explain to Balak (who had hired him to curse Bnei Yisroel): "How can I curse? Hashem has not cursed. How can I anger? Hashem is not angry. [23:8]"

With this, a whole different understanding can be found in the passuk {verse} from last week's parsha: "And the anger of Elokim burned because he was going. [22:22]" On a simple level, Elokim {G-d's attribute of justice} was angered that Bilaam was going to attempt to curse, even though he clearly knew that it was against the will of Hashem.

On a deeper level, the Ariza"l explains that it was the anger of Elokim that was going-as we learned

that Hashem didn't anger during those days. This forced exit of the attribute of anger was necessary but had its repercussions. The attribute of ahavah {love} inspires the fulfillment of the positive commandments. The attribute of yir'ah {fear} is necessary to abstain from that which is forbidden. Hashem's daily moment of anger instills this necessary yir'ah into the world, aiding us in choosing to follow the will of Hashem. The anger of The Attribute of Justice therefore burned because it was unable to have its proper influence on the world.

This actually led to Bilaam's advice to unleash the daughter's of Moav upon Bnei Yisroel. He understood that with Hashem's anger being withheld, Bnei Yisroel would more easily succumb to temptation; they would sin and bring Hashem's anger onto themselves.

With this, we now have a whole new understanding in the opening passukim {verses} of our parsha. "Pinchas? by zealously avenging My vengeance in their midst," inspired yir'ah in the hearts of Bnei Yisroel. By doing this, he compensated for the lost effects of Hashem's daily anger that had resulted in Bnei Yisroel succumbing to temptation.

"So that I did not consume Bnei Yisroel in My vengeance." On a simple level, Hashem didn't consume them after they had succumbed to the daughters of Moav. On a deeper level, being that Pinchas would compensate for the loss of yir'ah, Hashem was able to forego that anger during the days of Bilaam. Otherwise, Hashem would have consumed Bnei Yisroel in His vengeance by getting angry during that time and enabling Bilaam to place his curse.

We are now entering the period of mourning for the destruction of the Temples. It is so important to realize that Hashem's showing anger is actually an act of loving-kindness and a withholding of that anger can actually lead to destruction.

The Amidah prayer {Shmone Esray} speaks of Hashem, in the present tense, redeeming Israel and building Jerusalem. Every event that transpires in the world, even those and perhaps especially those that seem to be tragic displays of His anger, are actually bringing us closer, step by step.

May we merit witnessing the rebuilding of the Temple, and the coming of the Messiah, speedily in our days. © 2011 Rabbi Y. Ciner & torah.org

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg,
Rosh Yeshiva, Kerem B'Yavne

The Torah has only praise for the zeal of Pinchas, while at the same time the sages talk of the importance of peace. But this leaves us with a dilemma. What is more important for Judaism – fanaticism or tolerance?

In his essay, "The War of Opinions and Beliefs," Rav A.Y. Kook explains that there is a type of tolerance that stems from our understanding that we are only partial beings, and this leads to a feeling that we must accept other people the way they are. On the other hand, there is zeal based on the conviction that we alone are in possession of all the righteousness and the absolute truth.

Judaism is opposed to both of these approaches. We do not accept tolerance which is based on weakness. We also believe that everything is in the Torah, and we are fanatics about defending this position. But the fact that we possess everything does not deny the possibility that others also share some parts of our "whole."

"It is a bad sign for a group of people to think that they have exclusive possession of the source of all wisdom and righteousness and that everything else is vain and chasing after the spirit" [Igrot Hare'iya volume 1, page 17].

In addition, every ideological movement rests on a point of truth and good that is part of it. If not for such a point the movement would not exist at all. "Falsehood does not have a leg to stand on." [Shabbat 104a]. Therefore, when we come to fight against opposing movements, we must never reject the movement as a whole, since it stands for some truths that we also accept. We must find the positive elements of the movement and only fight against its negative aspects.

This is how Rav Kook explained to the people of Agudat Yisrael what he felt was the proper way to fight the nonreligious nationalistic movement. If we oppose the movement as a whole, we will at the same time be opposing the ideas of Eretz Yisrael, the return to Zion, the ingathering of the exiles, and the use of Hebrew. But these are all foundations that stem from the Torah. Therefore, instead of rejecting the entire concept we must react positively to the elements of truth and oppose only the bad elements that have been added to them. In an era when there is an attempt to deny the relationship between spirit of G-d and the land, the language, and the customs and to simply accept the "spirit of the nation" – "What should the righteous people of the generation do? To revolt against the spirit of the nation... is impossible... Rather what is needed is a tremendous effort to reveal the light and the holiness that rests within the spirit of the nation." That is, it is necessary to broaden the view of the Torah to show that it is the true source of all the ideals that are considered so lofty.

Here is what Rav Kook explained to parents whose children had abandoned Judaism and joined the socialist movements. "You should show the trait of pure kindness, and say to them that their preferences involve some good elements. Their only mistake is that they think that the good things they feel are against the words of the Torah, while the truth is that these

concepts are the main body of the Torah." [Igrot Hare'iyah volume 1, page 58].

With respect to the question with which we began this article, we can say, we are not infected with a "rabid fanaticism" that claims that we are the only ones with absolute truth or with a "feeble tolerance" that feels that Judaism is merely part of the truth. Rather what we feel is a high level of tolerance, where we know that we have everything but that does not deprive the other people of also having sparks that emanate from this truth.

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Moshe's Last Stand

This week the most illustrious career in Biblical history begins its final chapters. Moshe is officially informed that he will pass on and is told who his successor would be. But in informing Moshe of the transition, Hashem repeats both here in the Book of Bamidbar (27:12) and again in the Book of Devorim (32:51) the reason that Moshe will not lead the B'nai Yisrael into the Land of Israel. It is because he hit the water producing rock instead of speaking to it.

Why does Hashem seem to stress Moshe's sin? Rashi, the classic medieval commentator, explains that Moshe asked Hashem to publicly declare his sin in order to declare that this sin was his only flaw. He was afraid lest some would say that he, too, was amongst those who were destroyed for rebellion in the desert. He was afraid that he would be equated with the rebels and sinners. Thus, he asked Hashem to emphasize that the only flaw he committed was that of the rock.

It is very difficult to understand. How could Moshe even suspect that anyone would place him on that level? How could one even imagine that he was excluded from entering Israel for an act of treason that led to the demise of others? Why was it so important to Moshe that the Torah reiterates that the incident at the rock was his only transgression?

Radio commentator Paul Harvey once presented a piece of American history in the following manner: George Armstrong was appointed to the United States Military Academy in 1857. After graduating and commissioned in the cavalry, he quickly established a reputation for daring and brilliance in battle. His reputation was so well acclaimed that at the age of twenty-three, he was made the youngest brigadier general in United States history. George's energy and cunning paralleled the other great Georges who left their mark on military history—Generals George Washington and George S. Patton. In fact, George Armstrong was so successful, that by the end of the Civil War he became one of the most celebrated commanders.

His pursuit of Lee's army from Richmond in April 1865 destroyed the confederate lines of defense and captured prisoners, wagons, and guns -- until, on

the morning of April 9 he had totally defeated the enemy. It was to no one other than General George Armstrong that the Confederate flag of defeat was first presented.

After the Civil War, his career continued to flourish. He was assigned to the newly formed seventh Cavalry, Fort Riley, Kansas, and was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. In the fall of 1868 he won a brilliant victory over Black Kettle's band of Cheyenne Indians in the battle of the Washita and took part in many successful engagements over the next eight years.

But history has almost no recollection of the illustrious career of General George Armstrong. On June 22, 1876, General George Armstrong and his regiment, a force of about 655 men, set out for Little Bighorn. He encountered an overwhelming force of at least 4,000 well-armed Sioux warriors and was killed together with his entire regiment.

No longer were the Civil War successes the hallmark of General George Armstrong's career. Only remembered is the great defeat at Little Bighorn led by General George Armstrong—did I mention his last name -- Custer—General George Armstrong Custer at his last stand.

People often tend to forget the illustrious careers of great people because of a flaw that ended it. Moshe was punished for an infraction that is difficult to comprehend in mortal terms. He hit a rock, and produced water—one of history's greatest miracles—for a thirsting nation. Yet something was wrong. He was supposed to speak to the rock and instead he hit it. And between him and his Creator, there was a price to pay. We however must realize that a mistake, as great as its consequences were, cannot mar the illustrious career of the man who led us out of Egypt and developed us into the nation that we are today. In no way can that punishment diminish any regard that we have for Moshe. At Moshe's departure, that point was to be reiterated repeatedly. It is only because of the rock that he did not enter.

How often does a man who works tirelessly for years and who errs in his last stand, go down in disgrace for the act that terminated his career? How many people's last stand becomes their most notorious if not their only stand?

Perhaps Hashem's reiteration vis-a-vis Moshe are a lesson to all of us. There are no first stands and there are no last stands. If we stand for something worthy, then we stand forever! © 1997 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and Project Genesis, Inc.

