

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l

Covenant & Conversation

Embedded in this week's parsha is one of the great principles of leadership. The context is this: Moses, knowing that he was not destined to lead the next generation across the Jordan into the promised land, asked God to appoint a successor.

He remembered what happened when he was away from the Israelites for a mere 40 days. They panicked and made a golden calf. Even when he was present, there was a rebellion on the part of Korach and others against his leadership. The possibility of rift or schism if he died without a designated successor was immense. So he said to God: "May the Lord, the God who gives breath to all living things, appoint someone over this community to go out before them and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in. Let the Lord's people not be like sheep without a shepherd." (Num, 27: 16-17)

God duly chose Joshua, and Moses inducted him. One detail in Moses' request, however, always puzzled me. Moses asked for a leader who would "go out before them and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in."

That, surely, is saying the same thing twice. If you go out before the people, you are leading them out. If you come in before the people, you are bringing them in. Why then say the same thing twice?

The answer comes from a direct experience of leadership itself.

One of the arts of leadership -- and it is an art, not a science -- is a sense of timing, of knowing what is possible when. Sometimes the problem is technical. In 1981, there was a threat of a coal miners' strike. Margaret Thatcher knew that the country had very limited supplies of coal and could not survive a prolonged strike. So she negotiated a settlement. In effect, she gave in.

Afterward, and very quietly, she ordered coal stocks to be built up. The next time there was a dispute between the miners and the government -- 1984-5 -- there were large coal reserves. She resisted the miners and after many weeks of strike action they conceded defeat.

The miners may have been right both times, or wrong both times, but in 1981 the Prime Minister knew she could not win, and in 1984 knew she could.

A much more formidable challenge occurs when it is people, not facts, that must change. Human change is a very slow. Moses discovered this in the most dramatic way, through the episode of the spies. An entire generation lost the chance of entering the land. Born in slavery, they lacked the courage and independence of mind to face a prolonged struggle. That would take a new generation born in freedom.

If you do not challenge people, you are not a leader. But if you challenge them too far, too fast, disaster happens. First there is dissension. People start complaining. Then there are challenges to your leadership. They grow more clamorous, more dangerous. Eventually there will be a rebellion or worse.

On 13 September 1993, on the lawn of the White House, Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres and Yasser Arafat shook hands and signed a Declaration of Principles intended to carry the parties forward to a negotiated peace. Rabin's body language that day made it clear that he had many qualms, but he continued to negotiate. Meanwhile, month by month, public disagreement within Israel grew.

Two phenomena in the summer of 1995 were particularly striking: the increasingly vituperative language being used between the factions, and several public calls to civil disobedience, suggesting that students serving in Israel's defence forces should disobey army orders if called on to evacuate settlements as part of a peace agreement.

Calls to civil disobedience on any significant scale is a sign of a breakdown of trust in the political process and of a deep rift between the government and a section of society. Violent language in the public arena is also dangerous. It testifies to a loss of confidence in reason, persuasion and civil debate.

On 29 September 1995 I published an article in support of Rabin and the peace process. Privately, however, I wrote to him, urging him to spend more time on winning the argument within Israel itself. You did not have to be a prophet to see the danger he was in from his fellow Jews.

The weeks went by, and I did not hear from him. Then, on Motzei Shabbat, 4 November 1995, we heard the news that he had been assassinated. I went to the funeral in Jerusalem. The next morning, Tuesday 7 November, I went to the Israel embassy in London to pay my condolences to the ambassador. He handed me a letter, saying, "This has just arrived for you."

We opened it and read it together in silence. It was from Yitzhak Rabin, one of the last letters he ever wrote. It was his reply to my letter. It was three pages long, deeply moving, an eloquent restatement of his commitment to peace. We have it, framed, on the walls of my office to this day. But it was too late.

That, at critical moments, is the hardest of all leadership challenges. When times are normal, change can come slowly. But there are situations in which leadership involves getting people to change, and that is something they resist, especially when they experience change as a form of loss.

Great leaders see the need for change, but not everyone else does. People cling to the past. They feel safe in the way things were. They see the new policy as a form of betrayal. It is no accident that some of the greatest of all leaders -- Lincoln, Gandhi, John F. and Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Sadat and Rabin himself -- were assassinated.

A leader who fails to work for change is not a leader. But a leader who attempts too much change in too short a time will fail. That, ultimately, is why neither Moses nor his entire generation (with a handful of exceptions) were destined to enter the land. It is a problem of timing and pace, and there is no way of knowing in advance what is too fast and what too slow.

That is what Moses meant when he asked God to appoint a leader "to go out before them and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in." These were two separate requests. The first "to go out before them and come in before them" -- was for someone who would lead from the front, setting a personal example of being unafraid to face new challenges. That is the easier part.

The second request -- for someone who would "lead them out and bring them in" -- is harder. A leader can be so far out in front that when he turns round he sees that no one is following. He or she has gone out "before" the people, but has not "led them out." He has led but people have not followed. His courage is not in doubt. Neither is his vision. What is wrong is simply his sense of timing. People are not yet ready.

Moses was not assassinated, though there were times when he came close ("What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me," he once said, in Ex. 17: 4). But leading from the front, all too often he found people not willing to follow. Leadership is a constant battle between the changes you know must be made, and the changes people are willing to make. That is why the greatest of leaders seem, in their lifetime, to have failed. So it was. So it always will be.

But in truth they have not failed. Their success comes when others complete what they began *Covenant and Conversation is kindly sponsored by the Schimmel Family in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel zt"l* © 2024 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“Therefore tell him that I have given him My covenant of peace; and it shall be unto him, and to his seed after him, the covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was jealous for His God, and made atonement for the children of Israel.” (Numbers 25:12–13) Fanaticism, particularly when garbed in the accoutrements of extremist fundamentalism, hardly evokes in us a sympathetic bent. How could it, given its association with uncontrollable zeal and violence for the sake of heaven?!

But when we turn to the opening of this portion, the Torah lauds Pinchas for zealously killing a Jewish man and a Midianite woman in the very heat of their sexual passion as they recklessly defied God’s command. For responding so quickly and decisively, albeit without “due process,” we read that God spoke to Moses, saying, “Pinchas, a son of Elazar and grandson of Aaron the priest, was the one who zealously took up my cause among the Israelites and turned My anger away from them... Therefore tell him that I have given him My covenant of peace (Numbers 25:10–12).

The biblical summation is certainly one of praise and approbation. Indeed, Pinchas’ full genealogy is presented in this sequence; we are also given the name of his father as well as of his grandfather, Aaron the High Priest, indicating that the Torah wants to underscore his linkage to Aaron, “lover and pursuer of peace” (Avot 1:12). Moreover, both grandfather and grandson succeeded in stopping plagues sent by the Almighty to punish the Israelites. Aaron was instrumental in stopping the plague that broke out after the Hebrews raised angry voices against Moses and Aaron when Korach and his rebels were swallowed up by the earth (Numbers 17:6–11), and Pinchas’ act of zealotry arrested the plague which had destroyed twenty-four thousand Israelites who engaged in immoral sexual acts with the Midianites (Numbers 25:9).

When all is said and done it would appear that the Torah wants us to look upon Pinchas not only as Aaron’s grandchild but as his direct spiritual heir. And when Pinchas received the divine gift of a covenant of peace, it is clear that he was being marked eternally as a leader who fostered peace and well-being, rather than fanaticism and violence.

How do we square this with what appears to have been a flagrant act of zealotry?

In order to really understand the true significance – the purpose and accomplishment – of Pinchas’ act, it is necessary to view it within the precise context and situation of its perpetration. I would submit that had it not been for his quick response, nothing less than “war” would have broken out – and civil war against Moses at that! Pinchas’ aim was not only – or even chiefly – the righteous punishment of flagrant sinners; it

was first and foremost the salvation of Moses and Torah as the guides of the Israelites!

The Israelites had begun consorting with the Moabite women (Numbers 25), with harlotry leading to idolatry. They justified their actions philosophically and theologically by claiming that whatever is natural, whoever gives physical relief and “good feeling,” was proper and laudatory. This is the idol called Ba’al Peor, who was served by performing one’s natural functions before the idol, testifying to a lifestyle which justifies any and every physical expression. At this point, God commanded Moses to “take the leaders and impale them publicly before God” (Numbers 25:4). Only the leaders were targeted, but their death was to be vivid and painful, hanging in the hot sun.

What we have here on the part of the Israelites is a repetition of the Golden Calf debacle – but forty years later and in a far more grievous package. Then it was a panicky return to the comfort of Egyptian idolatry, a search for a Moses substitute; now it was glaring repudiation of both nationality and morality. Nevertheless, the previous time, at the dawn of Israel’s freedom, Moses lost no time in exacting punishment. He took the idol of the Golden Calf, ground it to powder, and called for volunteers to execute the ringleaders. The tribe of Levi killed three thousand Israelites on that day. Moses had only to send forth the clarion call – “Whoever is with God, stand with me” – and all of the Levites rallied to his side. Moses was clearly the leader of the Israelites. Indeed, the sinful idolatry at that time was even understandable. It had only occurred because of the people’s fear as a result of Moses’ absence; they felt like children bereft of their earthly father – and in their despair they turned to the Egyptian father-in-heaven-idol of a Golden Calf.

Now forty years had passed. Long gone were the grandiose hopes of an infant nation on the way to its Promised Land; such an exalted vision had been dashed upon the arid sand dunes of frustration and despair. The only thing this desert generation had to anticipate was dying in the desert! The bright Egyptian gloss on Moses’ liberating tunic had become burnished by the hot desert sun and the nagging Israelite complaints. The various rebellions turned Moses’ eyes downcast and made his shoulders sag; indeed, the would-be upstarts Datan and Aviram even refused to give the leader the courtesy of a meeting when they were summoned at his behest.

And now the disgusting Peor idolatry took place before Moses’ very eyes, those holy eyes which had a closer glimpse into the divine than any mortal before or after. Moses apparently did not feel himself to be sufficiently in control as to be able to impale the rebel leaders as God had requested. The best he could bring himself to do was direct the judges to take action. He also felt the necessity to change the divine graphically described punishment of hanging the leaders in the sun to the more diplomatic but far less aggressive command

that “each of you must kill your constituents who were involved with Ba’al Peor” (Numbers 25:5).

And then, as a response to Moses’ orders, a devastating occurrence followed: “Behold, an important personage (ish) from among the children of Israel came and brought...a Midianite woman in the sight of Moses and in the sight of the congregation of the children of Israel” (Numbers 25:6). Moses declared punishment for the idolaters – and a Jew added insult to injury by publicly committing adultery with a gentile Midianite woman!

And who was this Jew who dared defy the divine decree and the authority of Moses? He is biblically identified as none other than Zimri, prince of the tribe of Simeon, second in line of the tribes, between Reuben, the firstborn, and Levi, the priests. He was obviously continuing the rebellion of Korach, demanding his rights as a descendant of the son of Jacob who was born before Levi; he was now claiming for himself an exalted position. Perhaps that is why he chose Kozbi, a Midianite princess – a woman with status and lineage in the gentile world. And even more to the point, he chose a Midianite because he wanted to embarrass Moses as effectively as possible. It is as if he were daring Moses to stop his act of harlotry; after all, how could Moses criticize Zimri if the leader himself had a Midianite wife! No wonder Moses was paralyzed into silence and the people could only weep in impotence: “They were weeping at the Tent of Meeting” (Numbers 25:6). How else can we understand Moses’ lack of leadership, his inability to quell this rebellion against him and his God? As the sages of Talmud picture the scene, Zimri ran about taunting the venerated liberator of the Hebrew slaves: “How can he forbid sexual contact with Midianite women if he himself took a Midianite wife!” (Sanhedrin 82a).

Yes, the Israelite world had considerably changed from what it had been forty years earlier, during the period immediately following the Golden Calf. Now the Jews were no longer contrite in the presence of Moses. Everyone was demoralized and disappointed. Zimri now hoped to strike the death knell of Moses’ leadership by hitting below the belt, by taunting the supposed guardian of morality with the fact of his Midianite wife!

The Bible records: “And Pinchas saw” (25:7). What did he see? He saw the people rebelling and he saw Moses weeping. He saw the end of the history of the children of Israel almost before it began, he saw immorality and assimilation about to smash the tablets of stone for the second time – but now without a forceful, fiery, and respected Moses with the capacity of restoring the eternal tablets of testimony once again.

This is when Pinchas stepped in. In killing Zimri and Kozbi in the midst of their immoral act in front of all of Israel, he was not merely fanatically punishing a sinner without the justice of due process; he was quelling a rebellion against Moses which would have resulted in

anarchy at best. He reestablished Mosaic leadership and authority, he enabled Torah to remain supreme. Pinchas reinstated the covenant between God and Israel, and so he was truly worthy of the covenant of peace. © 2024 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Lord promises Pinchas that most valuable and yet the constantly elusive gift – the blessings of the covenant of peace. The world has known very little peace over the long millennia of human existence. Strife and conflict, war and violence, have been the staples of human existence from time immemorial. Many historians and social scientists maintain that war and violence are the natural and constant states of human affairs. So the promise of peace to Pinchas seems to be a little extravagant, especially since it appears that Pinchas has earned this reward of peace by committing an act of violence and war. Shall we say that a time of peace is merely the absence of war; a negative state of being that only marks the interregnum between wars and continued violence?

We are all well aware how difficult it is to achieve peace and how fragile its existence is when, apparently, it is somehow achieved. Its fragility is attested to in the Torah, where the vav in the word shalom is broken and incomplete. So, we may certainly wonder what actually and practically God's promise to Pinchas was - and how was it ever to be fulfilled. This perplexing issue is especially pertinent regarding Pinchas himself, who participated in the wars that Israel conducted against Midian and later against the Canaanite tribes in the Land of Israel during the times of Yehoshua and the Judges. Where is the promise of peace present in the life of Pinchas himself, let alone in the lives of the future generations of his descendants particularly and the Jewish people generally?

Many of the commentators to the Torah defined God's promise of peace to Pinchas and his descendants as being a personal and individual state of inner being, of what we colloquially call "being at peace with oneself." Pinchas is undoubtedly disturbed by the act of violence that he committed and by the widespread criticism of his actions by many of the Jewish people at that time.

Nevertheless, the Lord tells him that he did the right thing and that history will later thank him for his boldness and alacrity in stemming the tide of immorality that threatened to overwhelm the Jewish people. So Pinchas acquires, through God's blessing, the peace of mind and the necessary confident inner conviction of having committed an act that Heaven and history will deem to be justifiable and correct, even if it is currently unpopular in the eyes of much of society.

President Harry Truman is reported to have said that he lost little sleep over the atomic bombing of Japan which concluded World War II because he believed that

he saved millions of American and Japanese lives by his awesome decision. He never again agonized over that decision since he had achieved an inner peace regarding the matter. Our conscience always disturbs us when we make wrong decisions and pursue failed policies. It never rises to plague us when we have behaved correctly and decided wisely and morally. It is this blessing and reward that the Lord bestowed upon Pinchas and his descendants – the blessing of inner peace and moral contentment. © 2024 *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*

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

An opinion recorded in the Talmud states that prayers correspond to the daily sacrifices offered in the Temple (Numbers 28:4, Berachot 26b). As there were morning and afternoon standard offerings, so are there morning and afternoon services. As the limbs and the fats of the daily sacrifices could burn continuously during the night, so is there an evening service.

This opinion may be the conceptual base for our standardized prayer. Since sacrifices had detailed structures, so too do our prayers have set texts.

Maimonides elaborates on the need for a fixed text, arguing that after the destruction of the First Temple and the exile to Babylonia, the Jewish People lost its ability to speak articulately in Hebrew or, for that matter, to speak clearly in any language. Living in Babylonia (the Hebrew name for which, Bavel, literally means "mixture"), Jews began to speak in a combination of many tongues. In that setting, some individuals lost their ability to fully express themselves. A hierarchal model emerged in which Jews found themselves on different levels: some prayed eloquently, others with difficulty, and some perhaps not at all. Thus, a standard text was introduced to equalize the entire populace; it was a way to declare that all Jews are equal in the eyes of God (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Prayer 1:4).

Moreover, having a set text unites Jews regardless of geographical location or level of Jewish observance. One can enter a synagogue in France, India, or Russia and feel a powerful sense of connection in reciting the same Shema, the same Amidah.

Not only does set prayer connect us to our fellow Jews in what can be called horizontal unification, but it also fosters a sense of connection to past generations of Jews who recited these same tefillot.

And not only does this vertical unification reach backward in time, but it projects a link into the future, when our children and our children's children will recite the same tefillot. Its sameness connects past to future, shaping a wondrous existential present.

Jewish law insists that the intent of fixed prayer is not to stifle personal emotions, but to inspire spontaneous dialogue with God (Orach Chayim 119:1). Still, our analysis reveals the importance of standardization. Through the set text, Jews are democratized and united, not only horizontally through space but vertically through time. ©2024 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"**A**nd the sons of Korach did not die." (Bamidbar 26:11) After the plague that killed twenty-four thousand Jews, which was stopped by Pinchas's zealotry in defending the honor of Hashem by killing Zimri who publicly sinned, Hashem issued the command for Moshe and Elazar the Kohain to take a count of the Jews from the age of twenty and above.

Chazal give two reasons for the counting, as Rashi tells us. The first was because after so many died, there was a need to see how many were left. He likens this to a shepherd whose sheep have been attacked by a wolf. He counts them afterwards to take stock of his losses and what remains.

The second reason is, again likened to a shepherd, that the Jews were entrusted to Moshe with a precise number, so, when he is about to return the flock to its master, Hashem, they are counted to see how good of a job he has done in caring for them. He returns them with a number as well.

If the purpose was purely to see how many people there were, then it is curious that the Torah seems to go on numerous tangents. For example, when counting the children of Reuven, it goes into detail that Dasan and Aviram and all their descendants died. Why is that relevant if they're not here anymore? Further, immediately afterwards, it tells us the sons of Korach did not die - but being Levites, they were not included in this count anyway!

The sons of Yehuda, Er and Onan, are mentioned, but it follows through to say they died in Canaan. Why are they mentioned if they were never part of those who left Egypt at all? (The Ohr HaChaim does expound upon this posuk, and offers symbolism about the destruction of the Bais HaMikdash, quite relevant to this period of the year. See there for more.)

The daughters of Tzelophchad and Serach bas Asher are also singled out for mention, once again, seemingly not germane to either of the reasons Rashi quoted for the census.

Perhaps, though, we can understand that the idea of this counting of the Jews was not merely to know how many were alive at that moment. It was not simply a matter of WHO was there, but HOW. The Torah

wanted us to reflect on why we are here, and what is expected of us.

Dasan and Aviram were quarrel mongers who destroyed everything they had. However, the children of Korach, who had thoughts of repentance, did not die. Had they done more, they would have "lived." Er and Onan were wicked in Hashem's eyes. They died early, and left no remnant. In contrast, the daughters of Tzelophchad loved the land of Israel so much that they spoke up and asked for a share. Serach was kind and tactful.

It may be that while knowing how many Jews were left was crucial, and how they had been cared for by Moshe, understanding what made up the character of the Jews Moshe returned to Hashem's guidance teaches us how we are to live our lives – by making positive improvements in our relationships with Hashem and with our fellow Jews.

A delegation was sent from Brisk to convince the Bais HaLevi to become their new Rav. After making their presentation, the Bais HaLevi refused to accept the position. No argument would persuade him, until one member of the delegation said that 20,000 Jews are waiting for him in Brisk. When the Bais HaLevi heard this, he said he cannot disappoint 20,000 Jews and immediately accepted the position.

The Chofetz Chaim, upon hearing this story, burst into tears. He said if this is how a Tzaddik like the Bais HaLevi feels, certainly Moshiach would also come if 20,000 Jews were waiting for him. Apparently, there aren't that many. ©2024 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr

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Eliyahu Will Answer

All Our Questions

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

Some say that Pinchas is the same person as Eliyahu Ha-navi (the prophet Elijah). We await his coming, as promised by the prophet Malachi, with great anticipation. Eliyahu will provide answers to all our questions, clarifying laws as well as facts. Thus, the word "teiku," sometimes found in the Talmud following an unresolved question, is understood in folk etymology as an acronym for "*Tishbi yetaretz kushiyot u'ba'ayot*" ("Eliyahu will resolve all questions and difficulties").

Here is an example of a law to be clarified. When collecting a debt, do we leave the debtor the items which he needs to support himself? After all, when people donate to the *Beit HaMikdash*, we take their needs into account. Does this apply to debts owed to people as well?

The Talmud (*Bava Metzia* 114a) records that this question was once answered by Eliyahu based on a *gezeirah shavah*. (By the way, his view was not accepted by all. Even those who chose to accept his view were not doing so because he was a prophet. As we know, the

Torah is not in heaven, nor is a prophet permitted to make new laws. Rather, Eliyahu was no less a Torah scholar than anyone else, and might have even been better than most.)

Here are some examples of facts with which Eliyahu will help us. He will clarify whether certain *terumah* has become impure, and the status of a piece of meat which was out of a Jew's sight. He will be able to adjudicate monetary disputes in which a rabbinic court could not reach a decision and the money was held in abeyance. These cases are all very specific.

Eliyahu will also clear up some general doubts found in rabbinic literature about how things work: Do people base a meal (*kovea seudah*) on wine in the same way that they do on bread? Would a dead person have allowed certain disrespect of his body on the part of his heirs? May we write *tefillin* on the skin of a kosher fish, or is it considered disgusting? To resolve these doubts, we will rely on the prophetic power of Eliyahu, whose arrival we eagerly await. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

The Final Count

At the end of last week's parasha, we found the B'nei Yisrael influenced by the daughters of Moav to worship idols. This worship involved sexual immorality, as we saw with Cozbi and Zimri. Hashem caused a plague which was only stopped by the zealous act of Pinchas ben Elazar when he killed Cozbi and Zimri. There were twenty-four thousand deaths caused by this plague. This was a greater death toll than after the Golden Calf.

The Torah continues with its narrative: "It was after the plague... Hashem said to Moshe and to Elazar son of Aharon the Kohein, saying, 'Take a census of the entire assembly of the B'nei Yisrael, from twenty years of age and up, according to their fathers' house, all who go out to the army of Yisrael.' Moshe and Elazar the Kohein spoke with them in the plains of Moav, by the Jordan (River) near Jericho, saying, 'From twenty years of age and up, as Hashem had commanded Moshe and the B'nei Yisrael, who were coming out of the land of Egypt.'"

Many of the Rabbis present opinions as to the halted sentence, "It was after the plague." There are symbols of cantillation used when preparing the reading of the Torah, the symbol used at the word for plague is not the usual symbol for the end of a sentence (Sof Pasuk), but instead is the symbol that is found at the end of a phrase within the sentence (Etnachta). This is a clear indication that this sentence was abbreviated or suddenly stopped. HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains that, "the chapter finishes in the middle of a verse after the first sentence, and begins a new chapter with the concluding sentence in order to make it clear that, with the death of those that fell in the Peor sin, a

fresh pure chapter in the life of the people could start again."

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin asks why Hashem spoke to both Moshe and Elazar this one time. It was not uncommon for Hashem to speak with both Moshe and Aharon, because Aharon was also a Navi, a Prophet. Elazar, however was not a prophet, and several of the Rabbis explain that, even though the Torah says that Hashem spoke to both, Hashem really spoke only directly with Moshe who then told Elazar, and then both Moshe and Elazar commanded this to the B'nei Yisrael. Others wish to say that this sentence follows the story of Pinchas and his zealous act to save the B'nei Yisrael from further sin, and for that reason, Hashem spoke directly to Elazar, Pinchas' father, to honor him.

Rashi gives two explanations the purpose of this final count: (1) this could be compared to a shepherd whose flock was attacked by wolves, killing many of the sheep. The shepherd wishes to count his flock to know how many survived the attack, or (2) unrelated to the plague, Moshe was given the exact number of the B'nei Yisrael when they left Egypt. Now before his passing, he wished to recount his "flock" to know the number that he was returning to Hashem. This was like a person who had been given a sum of money to guard for his friend. He would count that money before returning it to be certain that he had protected it well.

HaRav Sorotzkin explains the first answer that Rashi gave, the analogy of a shepherd. HaRav Sorotzkin questions the analogy as it does not go far enough to explain the plague. He explains that Rashi may have presented this analogy to give credit to the B'nei Yisrael, as this plague came upon them only because of the wolves (Balak and Bilaam). It is not the fault (sin) of the sheep when wolves attack. It is, however, the responsibility of the shepherd to prevent the wolves from entering the fields where the sheep are grazing. HaRav Sorotzkin posits that this is the reason why Ibn Ezra says that the shepherd (Moshe) felt partially guilty and then counted the people out of love for those that remained.

The tribes of Yisrael were divided by families; each family's name was called with the names of the male children within each family. HaRav Hirsch suggests that this was done to demonstrate the sexual purity of the families. The number of "families" within each tribe normally was limited to the names of the first generation of families. According to the Ramban, "the number of family branches did not depend on the greater or lesser number of the members of the tribe." Nor were the family branches limited to one generation, as with Yehudah, Ephraim, and Binyamin, the grandchildren were separate branches, and with Menashe, the great-grandchildren formed a separate branch. The purpose of this separation into branches within each tribe is not made clear in the Torah until later, after the count was

completed.

The Torah explains, “Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, ‘To these shall the land be divided as an inheritance, according to the number of names. To the many, you shall increase its inheritance, and to the few, you shall lessen its inheritance; each one according to the counted ones shall his inheritance be given. Only by lot shall the land be divided, according to the names of their fathers’ tribes shall they inherit. According to the lot shall one’s inheritance be divided, between the many and the few.’”

HaAmek Davar explains that this was the main purpose of the count that had just taken place. Both the sections of the land which were given to each tribe and the sections of the tribe’s land that would go to each “family” was determined by these words. (Note that the tribe of Levi, Leviim and Kohanim, were not counted as they received no land). If one tribe was larger than another, it would receive a greater portion of the total land. Families within each tribe were also numbered and given land according to those numbers. Interestingly, the Torah does not specify that each tribe would receive an equitable portion of fertile land, grazing land, minerals, water sources, or any of the other necessities of survival and profit. What was understood was that each tribe would adjust to the land that it was given, learn to make the most of Hashem’s gift, and trade its abundance of benefits to others in exchange for their abundance of Hashem’s gift.

In today’s society, we have often failed to comprehend this message. Each person is blessed with his own special gift from Hashem. Taken by itself, it is never enough for his own sustenance. Each must interact with others in our society so that his gift can benefit others while their gifts can benefit him. His needs cannot be met if each of us has the same skill or gift, nor can one meet the needs of others if one must perform all tasks alone. Only “quality” work in our skill can provide the best for others. Rather than trying to make everyone equal, we should strive to help everyone become his own best, so that his “best” can benefit all. May we each seek to use our gifts from Hashem wisely to benefit all of Mankind. © 2024 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Jewish Geography

Sefer Bamidbar contains two censuses, one at the beginning of the Sefer (taken a year after the Exodus), and one in our Parasha (taken in the 40th year, shortly before entering the Promised Land, after the generation of the golden calf and the scouts died out). Although the totals were similar (603,550 vs. 601,730), some of the individual Tribes had significant differences. The biggest difference was Shimon’s loss of over 37,000 (more than half of their original total), 22,000 of which can be attributed to the plague that Pinachas stopped (see Rashi on Bamidbar 26:13). The second

biggest difference was Menashe’s gain of 20,500. With the next biggest gain being Asher’s 11,900, this seems significant – especially since Menashe had been only 3/4 the size of Asher in the first census.

In recent years, an intriguing suggestion has been made to explain Menashe’s growth, based on a notion put forth by some early commentators. This notion has also been used to explain a different issue: When Gad and Reuven asked for land on the east side of the Jordan River (in Transjordan) – a request that Moshe found extremely troubling – Menashe was given land on that side of the Jordan too, without having asked for it. Why was Menashe given land there – without joining Gad and Reuven’s request – especially if it was so problematic?

Divray Hayamim I (2:23) describes part of Menashe’s territory being taken by other nations, with the names of those whose land was taken indicating that this occurred well before the Children of Israel crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land. Although Radak addresses the timeline, and the commentary attributed to Rashi is among those who say it occurred in the time of the Judges, a commentary attributed to a student of R’ Saadya Gaon says that this occurred while the Children of Israel were still in Egypt. [See the appendix to Daat Mikra’s Divray Hayamim II, pages 87-89, for more about this commentary, which is included in Bar Ilan’s HaKeter Mikraos Gedolos, under the name “פרשן עלום שם.”] According to this commentary, when Yosef was the Viceroy (and Egypt still controlled Canaan and its environs), he allowed his sons to conquer land that had been promised to their grandfather (Yaakov), great grandfather (Yitzchok) and great-great grandfather (Avraham). This conquest was mentioned in Bamidbar (32:39-42) – even though it had occurred many years earlier – with Divray Hayamim relating when this land was taken from them. Therefore, when Moshe gave it to Menashe, he was really giving them back the land that had previously been theirs.

A similar concept is put forth by the commentary attributed to R’ Yehuda HaChasid (Shemos 1:7 and 1:10), quoted in the introduction to Daat Mikra’s Divray Hayamim I (pages 64-66). Although Rav Moshe Feinsein, z”l (Y”D 3:114-115) thought this manuscript was a forgery (due to theologically problematic ideas expressed within it), and therefore said it shouldn’t be published, scholars (even frum ones) are convinced it’s not a forgery. Yoel Elitzur (Places in the Parasha, Matot), after quoting both of these commentaries, quotes Abarbanel’s final words on Parashas Matos, that some say Yosef himself bought these cities during the famine, and his descendants asked Moshe if they can have them back. [It should be noted that the Torah never mentions Menashe requesting land in Transjordan, so most assume that no request was made – see Yerushalmi Bikkurim 1:8.]

Building on this (and “following in the footsteps”

of ideas put forth by Rabbi Yaakov Medan and others in the Dati Leumi community), Elitzur suggests that even after these lands were conquered from Menashe, many remained there (under foreign rule), and were still there when Moshe reconquered it. The growth of the Tribe of Menashe can therefore be attributed to those who had remained in Transjordan rejoining the nation, and their fellow tribesmen, after these cities were reconquered. [Rabbi Medan also discusses the ramifications of the covenant at Arvos Moav, since those who remained in Transjordan weren't part of the covenant at Sinai.]

Whether or not this is why Menashe's numbers increased, Menashe having previously conquered these cities could explain why Moshe gave this land back to them even if they didn't request it, and why he didn't give them a hard time if they did (bear in mind that Menashe's request might not have included getting the land right then and there, only that they eventually get it when all the Tribes get theirs). But I think there's another reason why Moshe included Menashe even if they didn't request getting land in Transjordan.

Shemos Rabbah (20:14), discussing why G-d led the nation the long way, gives this parable: "A king had 12 sons, but only 10 pieces of property. He said if I give them [the property] now, I will cause them to fight over it. Instead, I'll wait until I acquire two more pieces of property, and then I'll divide the [12 pieces of property] between them. Similarly, the Holy One, blessed is He, said if I bring them into [the Promised Land] now, there won't be a portion for all 12 Tribes. Instead, I'll keep them in the desert until they take over [the land on] the other side of the Jordan [River], and the sons of Reuven and the sons of Gad and half of the Tribe of Menashe will take that part, and then I'll bring [the nation] into the [Promised] Land." In other words, Reuven and Gad weren't asking to inherit land that wasn't supposed to be theirs, forgoing land in Canaan in exchange for land in Transjordan. That land was supposed to be theirs all along; the problem with their request was that it might be understood (by the rest of the nation) as trying to avoid having to conquer Canaan. After they fully committed to crossing the Jordan and leading the conquest there, Moshe acquiesced.

Once Moshe agreed to let Reuven and Gad start settling in Transjordan right away – rather than schlepping their families (and belongings) across the river and then back again after everyone else got their land – he couldn't make Menashe shlep their families back and forth, so he also gave them the part of their land that would eventually be theirs – including the part they had previously conquered – even if they hadn't requested it. Even according to those who maintain that Reuven and Gad would not have received land in Transjordan had they not insisted upon it, once they were allowed to stay there, it would have been unfair if Menashe wasn't allowed to stay there too. Nevertheless, the Midrash (and the wording and paragraphing of their

request) indicates that Reuven and Gad realized this was their land, so didn't want to wait to start making it their home. And if they were allowed to do that, it wouldn't be fair if Menashe wasn't allowed to do the same. © 2024 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI SHAFRAN

Cross-Currents

Although the Torah tells us that Moshe did precisely what he was commanded to do and transmitted his leadership role to Yehoshua, along with a degree of his spiritual splendor, the pasuk relates, seemingly superfluously, that Moshe "took" Yehoshua as part of his fulfillment of the commandment (Bamidbar 27:22).

Rashi, quoting a statement found in various Midrashim (e.g Sifri), explains that "took" means that "he persuaded him with words, informing him of the reward that will be given to the Jewish people's leaders in the world to come."

Reward in the world to come is a reflection of the essential importance of an act. Here, Yehoshua had to be persuaded that his acceptance of the mantle of leadership was truly Hashem's will. Only by being "taken" by that fact did he accept his new role.

Like Moshe before him, who argued with Hashem and tried to avoid the leadership role Hashem had him assume, Yehoshua is a reluctant leader.

It's a painfully obvious thought but still worth our focus: Leaders of populations today present the perfect opposite: Their egos and feelings of worthiness propel them to fight for the role of leader, stopping at nothing, undeterred by the true state of their abilities, by realities, by demonstrable truths.

It wasn't always that way. Dwight Eisenhower had to be effectively drafted to run in 1948; a century and a half earlier, George Washington initially rejected all requests to enter politics. American Civil War General William Tecumseh Sherman, suggested as the Republican candidate for the 1884 election, famously stated, "I will not accept if nominated and will not serve if elected."

Those men were exceptions and may reflect an ironic truth we can glean from the Torah: A decisive qualification for a true leader is his reluctance to become one. © 2024 Rabbi A. Shafran and torah.org

