

Musaf Reader

Parshat Pinchas

July 10-11, 2009

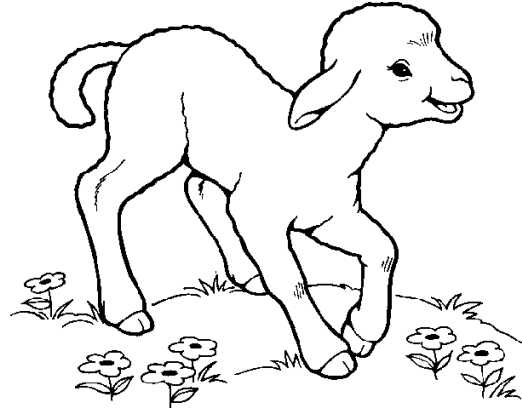
Parshah

Rabbi Yissocher Frand (torah.org)

The story of Tzelofchad's daughters appears in our parsha: "The daughters ... stood before Moshe and before Elazar the Kohen, and before the leaders and the entire assembly at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, saying: 'Our father died in the wilderness, but he was not amongst the assembly that was gathering against Hashem in the assembly of Korach, rather he died of his own sin; and he had no sons. Why should the name of our father be omitted from among his family because he had no son? Give us a possession among our father's brothers.'" [Bamidbar 27:1-4].

Although Moshe was the supreme judge and ruler amongst the Jewish people, he did not rule on this petition by himself, but he rather brought the request directly before the Almighty. Hashem ruled in favor of the petition of the daughters of Tzelofchad: "You shall surely give them a possession of inheritance among the brothers of their father..." [Bamidbar 27:7]

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin asked why Moshe found it necessary to take this question to the Ribono shel Olam. Was it such a difficult question that he did not feel qualified to answer it himself? And, if for some reason Moshe felt uncomfortable handling the question on his own, why didn't he seek the counsel of 70 elders who could have been called upon to deliberate and come up with a definitive legal ruling in the case?



Rav Sorotzkin argues that a careful reading of the pasukim [verses] here will answer both questions. First of all, the sisters stress: "Our father died in the wilderness, but he was not part of the Korach rebellion." In others words, they are emphasizing to Moshe that their father was a most loyal supporter. Based on this plea -- to come to the aid of the unfortunate plight of the offspring of a loyal supporter, Moshe Rabbeinu felt that he was a "noge'ah b'davar" -- his impartiality in the matter might be compromised by personal considerations.

That explains why Moshe recused himself from the case. However, what about the 70 Elders? Why could they not give judgment in the matter?

Rav Sorotzkin explains that this is explained by picturing the scene portrayed by our pasukim: "They came before Moshe and before Elazar the Kohen, and before the leaders and before the entire assembly." This was not a court appearance. They did not go into Beis Din. They were five sisters, the youngest of which was over 40. None of them were married. Nor did they have any dowries. They were pleading to be given a portion of their father's estate.

Imagine this: Five unmarried sisters who desperately need shidduchim come in front of the entire nation and start crying that they were not given an inheritance! Who among the Elders would be willing to take on this case and rule "Sorry, you women don't get a portion in the Land!"

Therefore, Moshe Rabbeinu recused himself because he had a personal interest (they were the daughters of a loyalist follower); and it was too politically ticklish to ask the judges to rule on the matter. Therefore, he brought their case straight to the All Merciful Father in heaven. His ruling would be acceptable to everyone. Even if He would rule "No", no one would have complaints that the All Merciful was not merciful enough.

Later in the parsha, Moshe is told to prepare himself for death. "Go up to the mountain of Avarim and see the land that I have given to the Children of Israel. You shall see it and you shall be brought to your people..." [Bamidbar 27:12-13]

Hearing this news, Moshe realized that the time had come to pick a successor. He asked Hashem: "May, Hashem, G-d of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the assembly..." [Bamidbar 27:16]

I have a friend in the rabbinate in the NY area. His name is Rabbi Yaakov Luban. Before he entered the rabbinate, he went to the Spinka Rebbe and asked for advice upon entering the rabbinate. Rabbi Luban asked, "What is the most important thing a Rav should know?"

The Spinka Rebbe took out a Chumash and read him this parsha: "May, Hashem, G-d of the spirits of all flesh,

appoint a man over the assembly..." Rashi notes that this pasuk uses a peculiar expression found virtually nowhere else in Torah. Where else do we ever find Hashem referred to as "G-d of the spirits of all flesh"? What is the connotation of this expression?

Rashi explains: Moshe said before Him, "Master of the World! The personality of each individual is revealed before You; they do not resemble one another. Appoint a leader who can put up with each individual according to his personality." You, G-d, know better than any human that no two people on this planet are exactly the same. Every person thinks differently, acts differently and reacts differently than every other person. Therefore, I ask You to appoint a leader who will have patience with and be able to tolerate each person according to the needs of that person's individual personality.

The Spinka Rebbe told Rabbi Luban that the key to success in the Rabbinate is to be able to tolerate (be 'sovel') the personality needs of each and every individual. One does not need to agree with every one else's point of view. As a matter of fact, a Rabbi should generally NOT agree with every one else's point of view. He should lead, not follow. "He should go out before them and come in before them..." [26:17]. But he must be able to tolerate every single individual — even those with opinions diametrically opposed to his own.

There is a common expression — "I can't be 'sovel' this person" -- which means "he drives me up a wall -- I can't stand him!" These words cannot come from the lips of a Jewish leader. A leader must

be 'sovel' the opinions and personality of each and every one of his followers.

The Kotzker Rebbe (Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk) asked why the portion dealing with appointment of Moshe's successor appears at exactly this point in Chumash, in Parshas Pinchas. Why, he asks, is it not found towards the end of Sefer Devarim, perhaps in Parshas VaYeLech?

The Kotzker Rebbe answers that Moshe Rabbeinu did not wake up one day and discover that he needed to have a successor. For a very long time, he had a strong opinion of who the next leader of Israel should be. He thought his heir apparent was Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aharon the Kohen.

Then the incident occurred in Shittim, at the end of Parshas Balak. Pinchas took a sword in his hand and he was jealous on G-d's behalf. His act of zealotry saved the Jewish nation. He stopped the plague. He was given the Covenant of Peace. What a great resume he had!

However, at that point, Moshe realized that Pinchas could not be the leader. The zealot cannot tolerate the foibles of every mortal. The zealot does not say "I hear what you have to say. I may disagree, but I understand what you are saying." He acts on his convictions. He takes a sword in his hand.

Is zealotry sometimes necessary? Yes. Can a zealot be the High Priest? Yes. But can he be the leader, the Rabbi of Israel? The answer is no. That he cannot be.

So it was appropriate that right here in Parshas Pinchas, Moshe turned to

Hashem and told him "I need someone to succeed me and I need to move on to 'Plan B'. My first plan, that Pinchas would be the next leader of the Jewish people, will not work. This is not a job for him. What I need is someone who will serve in the Image of the "G-d of the spirits of all flesh". I need someone who appreciates, can live with, and work with all individuals, people with totally disparate spirits, interests, and personalities.

This, the Spinka Rebbe told Rabbi Yaakov Luban, is the most important thing for a person entering the rabbinate to realize.

Haftarah **Rabbi Dovid Siegel (torah.org)**

This week begins a series of haftarah 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 haftarah 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 Moshe 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.'" (Devorim 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 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.