

# TEMPERAMENT OF A KOHEN

*by Shlomo Katz*

**Hamaayan / The Torah Spring**  
**Edited by Shlomo Katz**  
**Pinchas Volume XII, Number 37**  
**24 Tamuz 5758**  
**July 18, 1998**

---

**Sponsored by:**  
**Mel and Barbara Ciment and Family**  
**in memory of Mr. Jack Ciment a"h**  
**Sarah bat Yitzchak Hakohen Katz a"h**

## PINCHAS

### Today's Learning

**Taharot 6:4-5**  
**Kitzur 176:5-177:1**  
**Eruvin 75**  
**Yerushalmi Eruvin 5**

#### **The Daughters of Tzelofchad**

Chazal praise the daughters of Tzelofchad for seeking a portion of the land of Eretz Yisrael (as told in this parashah). Why? Who would not want to own a share of Eretz Yisrael?

R' Elya Meir Bloch z"l explains that the greatness of Tzelofchad's daughters showed in the way they made their request. They did not go to their cousins in their own tribe and demand a share of the latter's land. Rather, they went before Moshe and asked that he make some arrangements for them as G-d would command.

Also, the sisters' motive may be gauged from Hashem's response. He testifies through the Torah, for eternity, that (Bemidbar 27:7), "The daughters of Tzelofchad speak properly."

In general, says R' Bloch, a person cannot speak properly if his motives and thoughts are not pure. R' Bloch's father, R' Yosef Leib Bloch z"l explained that a person's speech reveals the purity of his thoughts. This explains stories in the Talmud where individuals were severely punished for seemingly minor offenses. For example, in Chagigah (3b) we read that R' Eliezer was unable to attend the yeshiva and he asked his student what had been taught that day. Because the student answered immediately and did not hesitate to teach his teacher, he was horribly punished. (He was later cured miraculously.) The student's seemingly slight mistake - after all, he was fulfilling his teacher's wishes by answering - actually demonstrated a lack of respect for the teacher. (Peninei Da'at p. 113; Shiurei Da'at, II p.169)

\*\*\*\*\*

## The Temperament of a Kohen

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

Rashi writes that after Pinchas killed Zimri in defense of G-d's honor, Bnei Yisrael teased him, "Look at the acts of the grandson of Yitro [on his mother's side] who fattened calves for idolatry." In Pinchas' defense, Hashem emphasized that Pinchas was a descendant of Aharon.

R' Moshe Shick z"l (19th century) elaborates: The gemara (Kiddushin 70b) states, "If you see a kohen who is arrogant, be assured that his lineage is genuine, as it is written (Hoshea 4:4), 'Your nation is argumentative like a kohen'." Thus Hashem said, "Pinchas has demonstrated by his anger at Zimri that he is a genuine descendant of Aharon."  
(Maharam Shick Al Hatorah)

R' Shmuel Eidels z"l ("Maharsha") explains the above words of the prophet Hoshea as follows: Kohanim are argumentative because they think they are too important to give in. The prophet is rebuking the rest of the nation for acting like kohanim, i.e., being argumentative, even though they are not as important as the kohanim. (Chiddushei Aggadot: Kiddushin 70b)

Another gemara (Bava Batra 160b) makes a related statement: "Kohanim are bad-tempered." Maharal explains that this is so because the "fire of holiness" burns within them and causes them to "boil." (Chiddushei Aggadot, end of tractate Sanhedrin)

R' Yehonatan Eyebchutz disagrees. He writes: Kohanim are meant to be kind-hearted people, just

as their ancestor Aharon was known as a "lover of peace and pursuer of peace." However, so great is the strength of the forces of impurity which have overtaken us that the very things which are potentially the most holy in fact have become the most profane. This goes so far that the gemara records instances of kohanim killing each other in the Temple courtyard while arguing over who would perform certain Temple services. (Ya'arot D'vash I, No. 1)

Or: Because kohanim are by nature kind-hearted, their kindness must be balanced by bad-temper, lest they carry kindness to absurd extremes. Chessed perverted leads to immorality and adultery [see Vayikra 20:17], precisely the sin of Zimri. Because Pinchas saved the day by exhibiting anger and opposing the perversion of chessed, he merited to become a kohen. (Me'or Enayim: Parashat Pinchas)

The gemara (Berachot 44a) records that the population of a certain city in Eretz Yisrael was once found to include 80 pairs of brothers who were kohanim married to 80 pairs of sisters who were daughters of kohanim. A similar search was conducted in Bavel and all that was found was one pair of brothers who were kohanim married to a pair of sisters, but those sisters were not daughters of kohanim.

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l observes that this gemara highlights the unique qualities of Eretz Yisrael. Given the arrogant and argumentative nature of kohanim, those 160 marriages (in which both spouses were kohanim) were potential time bombs. Nevertheless, they apparently were successful, for if they had not been, the second sister of each pair would not have married her brother-in-law's brother. In contrast, outside of Eretz Yisrael, even one such marriage could not exist. (Ein Ayah p.197)

\*\*\*\*\*

## **An Astonishing Midrash**

*Because Moshe did not kill Zimri, Moshe's burial place is not known.*

R' Shlomo Kluger z"l explains: R' Yitzchak Abarbanel z"l writes that Moshe's burial place was concealed lest it be made into a shrine for idolatry. R' Abarbanel also writes that the Moabite idol, Pe'or, was originally a shrine to a person by that name.

R' Kluger elaborates: Why should Moshe be punished for not killing Zimri? After all, Chazal say that Moshe simply forgot the halachah that one who commits the sin Zimri committed (Bemidbar 25:6) is killed instantly without trial!

The answer is that Zimri had committed another sin for which Moshe must have know that the punishment was death. Chazal say that the Moabite women conditioned their relationships with Bnei Yisrael upon the latter's serving the idol, Pe'or. Thus, Zimri, too, presumably worshipped that idol.

Moshe should have killed Zimri for worshipping an idol, but he failed to do so. Some people might

have concluded from this that Moshe condoned making a deity out of a departed leader. Accordingly, Moshe's burial place had to be concealed. (Imrei Shefer: Parashat Balak)

\*\*\*\*\*

## **R' Avraham Klausner z"l** **14th century**

Little is known about R' Avraham Klausner, but he was an important link in the transmission of Ashkenazic (especially Austrian) minhagim/customs. In his Sefer Minhagim (of which he actually wrote only part), he reports on many customs of Rashi, Maharam Me'Rotenburg, R' Mordechai ben Hillel, Rabbenu Asher ("Rosh") and others. Sometimes he quotes conflicting customs, and his student, R' Isaac of Tirnau, observed that R' Avraham's purpose was only to report, not to decide between those conflicting customs. (The part of Sefer Minhagim which R' Avraham did not write preceded him, but its authorship is unknown. Some attribute it to R' Chaim Paltiel, while others suggest that it is the collective work of many generations of French and German sages.)

It is known that R' Avraham lived in Vienna, Austria and shared the rabbinate of that city with R' Meir ben Baruch Halevi (1320- 1390). It is speculated based on Vienna property records that R' Avraham died between 1408 and 1410 and that his wife's name was Rivka.

R' Avraham also led a yeshiva. Among his students, in addition to R' Isaac of Tirnau, was R' Yaakov Moellin ("Maharil"). Both of these scholars also authored compendia of minhagim, and much of Ashkenazic practice today follows Maharil's customs. (Sources: The Artscroll Rishonim p.148; Introduction to Sefer Minhagim Le'Rabbenu Avraham Klausner [Yerushalayim 1978]; Introduction to Sefer Minhagim Le'Rabbenu Isaac Tirnau [Yerushalayim 1979])

---

Copyright © 1998 by [Shlomo Katz](#) and Project Genesis, Inc.

---

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ("lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah"), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Project Genesis](#) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.

---