

CONTINUITY OR BUST

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

Consistency is one of the most crucial "weapons" in fighting the Yetzer Hara, whose operative role is to create chaos. Life requires initiative, inspiration, and momentum, without which it is extremely difficult for human beings to grow positively, and to maintain a close relationship with G-d. The Yetzer Hara knows this, and uses inconsistency to destroy all three. Therefore, the fight for life is the fight for continuity.

We can still remember from last week's parsha how Balak and Bilaam plotted to disrupt the spiritual bond between the Jewish people and G-d. They were successful to some degree; many Jews ended up worshipping the idol Ba'al Peor, and others became involved with Midyanite women. The result was complete havoc and Divine wrath-chaos, the biggest break in continuity one can experience.

From the midst of the chaos someone arose to save the day:

Pinchas, the son of Elazar the son of Aharon the priest saw and arose from amidst the assembly, and took his spear in his hand. He went after the Jewish man into the recess, and speared them both, the Jewish man and the woman ... Those that died in the plague were twenty-four thousand. (BaMidbar 25:7-9)

We learn from Pinchas that unity leads to continuity, and continuity leads to unity. The midrash says that Pinchas' action caused a major uproar amongst the Jewish people, who questioned his zealous act. After all, he had killed a prince of the Jewish people, while he had been but a commoner. However, the Torah testifies in this week's parsha to the fact that G-d not only praised Pinchas for what he did, but even elevated him to a position that normally cannot be earned, only inherited: the priesthood:

*G-d told Moshe, "Pinchas, the son Elazar, the son Aharon HaKohen, turned away My anger from the Jewish people, and was zealous with My jealousy in the midst of them, so that I shouldn't destroy the children of Israel. Therefore, I give to him My covenant of peace; he and his descendants after him will have the covenant of the **PRIESTHOOD** forever ... (BaMidbar 25:10)*

Inheritance symbolizes continuity, which is why the laws of inheriting Eretz Yisroel are in this week's parsha as well. In fact, one of the words for inheritance is "nachalah" which means "river," an important symbol of continuity. And if continuity is such an issue in this week's parsha, then it makes perfect sense that the Korban Tamid-the Continual Burnt-Offering-is also found here. (The parsha ends discussing the holidays, which make up the Jewish yearly cycle, another important symbol of continuity.)

The Torah says more. Aside from being made a priest, Pinchas became the very symbol of Jewish unity and continuity, even in the actual words of the Torah itself. To begin with, the story of Pinchas (unlike most in the Torah) covers two sections in the Torah, unifying them. His seed is also promised the priesthood, and his covenant is called an "eternal" one. It is also called "bris shalom" (Covenant of Peace), another sign of eternity, because true peace (shalom) is true unity (shalaim means "whole") which is eternal. Perhaps this is why something unusual happens in the midst of the parsha itself: the Torah speaks of the plague which killed all those involved with the Midyanite woman, and then the verse is broken into two parts, like so:

After the plague. G-d said to Moshe and Elazar the son of Aharon the priest ... (BaMidbar 26:1)

It is as if the verse is saying: it was Pinchas' action that ended the plague, and allowed G-d once again to speak to Moshe and Elazar. It was Pinchas who restored order and reconnected the Jewish people to G-d, who elevated the Jewish people once again to the level of continuity. And as a reward for this, Pinchas not only became a symbol of the very continuity he restored, he **HIMSELF** became continuous, becoming Eliyahu the prophet who never died.

Hence, from Pinchas we can learn how our own commitment to the continuity of the Jewish people directly effects our own continuity, both in terms of our connection to G-d, and in terms of our longevity of life, in This World, and The Next One.

(Adapted from Rabbi Winston's book, "Bereishis: A Beginning With No End, Essays on Parashas Bereishis," from the chapter titled, "Continuity and Perfection.")

Shabbos Day:

"Who is a wealthy person?" asks Ethics of our Fathers, and answers: "One who is happy with his portion." This mishnah teaches that wealth derives from happiness and not the other way around. Further, the mishnah leads to the inference that if one cannot be happy with what one presently has, then further material possessions will also not increase one's level of happiness.

As well-known and widespread as these ideas may be, deep down many people believe that the portion they presently have is not necessarily their portion, that is, the portion meant for them. As a

result, they feel a sense of want that detracts from their happiness and they tend to unduly focus on having "more."

The mishnah, however, by stating "his" portion instead of "the portion he presently has," indicates that one's present portion is indeed his **INTENDED** portion. The rabbis confirm this message by teaching that what one actually possesses at any given moment in time is what they are **MEANT** to possess at **THAT** point-in-time. It is what they **NOW** require to grow beyond their present spiritual level. If one grows, the tools they require for growth will also increase, according to the need. Likewise, if one spiritually regresses, they might require a reduction of physical assets to stimulate spiritual growth.

This idea is alluded to in this week's parsha. When it came time to divide the Land of Israel up among the many families and tribes, it was done by way of lottery. Now, normally, for most people, a lottery implies randomness and chance. However, as the Talmud explains (see Rashi on , the lottery used to divide the Land was miraculous, each lot literally verbalizing what piece of land was to go to whom. There was no mistaking the Divine Providence in the division of Eretz Yisroel, and therefore, a family had to accept G-d's decision as being the best for them.

We may not receive what we need by way of lottery these days, certainly not ones that can talk and confirm G-d's role in our daily sustenance. However, the message is still the same. We have to be happy with our portion because it **IS** our portion. It doesn't mean that you can't want more, and perhaps, even strive for more. But it does mean that one cannot go through life feeling that you received the "short end of the stick."

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

When it came time to discuss the method of dividing Eretz Yisroel (27:1), the daughters of Tzelofchad had a problem: their father had died and had left no sons. Since the inheritance was to go to the sons of the family, this meant that their family would lose out on the chance to have a piece of Eretz Yisroel. This so bothered them that they went and approached Moshe Rabbeinu himself to pose the problem.

Strangely enough, Moshe himself had been stumped, and was forced to go to G-d to resolve the dilemma. In the end, G-d sided with the daughters of Tzelofchad, and because of them, the law was introduced that the daughters inherit from their father in the case where there are no sons to do so.

As we know from other places, a new law had not been created because the daughters of Tzelofchad had been bothered, as if to say that, had they not asked, the law would never have come to be. Instead, it was a law that was waiting to be revealed, and the daughters of Tzelofchad had had the merit to be the vehicle to bring it about.

And what merit had that been?

The midrash says that the daughters of Tzelofchad received the reward of the entire generation. Usually when the midrash makes such a sweeping statement, it means that the recipients did something spectacular to warrant such reward. However, in the case of the daughters of Tzelofchad, what spectacular mitzvah had they done, other than looking out for their **OWN** best interest in securing their family a piece of Eretz Yisroel?

I heard a tape by Rabbi Yissocher Frand, shlita, of Baltimore Ner Israel Yeshiva that answers this question. Quoting another rabbi, he points out that in the eyes of G-d, sometimes, small things are big things by virtue of the fact that no one else saw fit to do the same. And, in the case of B'nos Tzelofchad, their concern over a portion of Eretz Yisroel, especially at a time that most Jews still longed for Egypt made them stand out, and outstanding. For this reason, says Rabbi Frand, the midrash says their reward was tremendous.

At the risk of sounding repetitive, having spoken about Eretz Yisroel three weeks in a row (how's **THAT** for continuity!), it was their love of Eretz Yisroel that brought them before Moshe at such a crucial time. Rashi makes the ancestral connection to Yosef, who also had tremendous love for Eretz Yisroel. In the end, as a result, the daughters of Tzelofchad got far more than a portion in Eretz Yisroel, they received a greater portion in The World-to-Come, because, as we have said before, the two are quite similar, both being concepts of continuity as well.

MELAVE MALKAH: THE FOURTH MEAL:

Yes, there is a fourth meal for Shabbos, though not on Shabbos itself. Shabbos is compared to a queen, and just like a queen is escorted into the city, so is she escorted out of the city once she leaves. This is the purpose of the Melave Malkah (literally, "Escorting the Queen"), to send Shabbos off with honor.

For this reason, people often light two Shabbos candles from the Havdalah candle, symbolic of the desire to bring the light of Shabbos into the working week. The table is supposed to be set with a white table cloth, and, ideally, one should eat somewhat of a formal meal, even a freshly cooked dish if possible. However, one can certainly fulfill his obligation (if necessary) with a fruit or a piece of cake, but how will Shabbos feel?

Partaking of the Melave Malkah is supposed to invoke Divine help for an easy birth, so expectant mothers often make a point of doing at least something for this meal. And for those who are unable to eat any more food because they ate at Seudos Shlishis as if it was the last meal of the day, the rabbis quote Shlomo HaMelech who said, "The eyes of the wise are in his head," that is, the wise person projects ahead and eats less at the Third Meal so that he can eat the Fourth Meal comfortable (especially in the summertime when Seudos Shlishis comes so late).

For those who make a point of treating the Melave Malkah as an important extension of Shabbos talk

of how the holiness of Shabbos continues into the week. They become less depressed Shabbos afternoon, knowing that some of Shabbos will not go out for them after Ma'ariv and Havdalah. In the words of one person, not only does a Melave Malkah enliven their Motzei Shabbos, its impact is felt even Friday Night!

Have a Great Shabbos,
Pinchas Winston

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Rabbi Winston has authored many books on Jewish philosophy (Hashkofa). If you enjoy Rabbi Winston's Perceptions on the Parsha, you may enjoy his books. Visit Rabbi Winston's [online book store](#) for more details! www.thirtysix.org