

# GOING AGAINST THE FLOW

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

## Friday Night:

*G-d spoke to Moshe saying, Pinchas son of Elazar son of Aharon the priest returned My anger from the Children of Israel in his jealousy for My jealousy in this midst of them, so that I did not destroy them in My jealousy. (Bamidbar 25:10)*

This week's parshah "introduces" a concept that is really, in effect, the backbone of the service of G-d. The truth is, it is an idea that is part-and-parcel of everyday life, and is often the source of praise and reward in such places as family life and the business world. It is called, self-sacrifice.

In Hebrew, it is called, "mesiros nefesh" (literally, "handing over of one's soul"), because that is what one is doing when he gives of himself for another cause. This is why stores owners often place their first-earned ten dollar bill up on the wall. It is not that they have never seen or possessed a ten dollar bill before; they have. But that is not just any ten dollar bill up there on the wall--that is ten dollars of the owner up on the wall, if not more.

This is also why one is more likely to spend money he did not earn, faster than money he did earn, even though it is of an equal amount and accomplishes the same thing. Putting ourselves out for some cause is tiring and therefore not easy, and psychologically, flagrant spending of the money is like trivializing the work that was performed. Holding on to the money is like freezing our effort in time, and enjoying its fruits longer (unless, of course, what we buy is meaningful to us).

However, as common a practice as such self-sacrifice may be around the world (even to the point that people blow themselves up and murder innocent victims "in the name of" their gods), it is not an easy concept to actualize when it comes to serving THE G-d. Why? Because, most cases of self-sacrifice in life, even when they appear selfless on the surface, are often self-serving as well--even in cases where the person dies for a "higher cause." Deep down inside, the person believes that there is something to be gained by what he is about to do.

As we learn in this week's parshah, self-sacrifice for G-d means altruism to the highest degree possible:

Pinchas son of Elazar son of Aharon the priest returned My anger from the Children of Israel in his jealousy for My jealousy ...

And that is not something that is proved by dying for G-d; that is something that becomes revealed when one lives for G-d. For, dying for G-d is a one-time event, often preceded by a burst of inspiration and sense of self-righteousness (when it is not forced upon the person). However, living for G-d is a daily task, from the moment one wakes up in the morning until the moment one goes to sleep at night (even how one sleeps and arises in the morning is addressed by Jewish law!).

This is how Pinchas really became a hero, able to go against the tide of popular opinion. There is no question his willingness to put his life on the line to stop the plague and revive the broken relationship with G-d was a tremendous symbol of the depth of his *mesiros nefesh*. However, if we recall from last week's parshah, it was something specific that Pinchas "took" with him to act on G-d's behalf that caused him to emerge from the midst of a weakened people:

*Pinchas son of Elazar son of Aharon the priest got up from the midst of the Assembly and took a spear (romach) in his hand ... (Bamidbar 25:7)*

We know that the term "romach" symbolizes the positive mitzvot of the Torah, because numerically, the word romach equals "248," the total amount of positive mitzvot in the Torah. And, whereas negative mitzvot can be "performed" by doing nothing when the occasion arises (eg. not eating treif food when placed before you), a positive mitzvah requires an act of *mesiros nefesh*: a decision to perform the mitzvah, motivation to perform the mitzvah, and then the energy, concentration, and intention to properly perform the mitzvah--every day, all the time.

This is why the Torah keeps associating Pinchas with his priestly-lineage, all the way back to Aharon HaKohen himself. For, priests are called throughout the Talmud as "zealots for G-d." Service in the Temple required nothing less than constant *mesiros nefesh* on behalf of G-d.

In fact, the only way to properly "die for G-d," as we learn from Pinchas is to first constantly "live for G-d." And, every time a person puts himself out for G-d, selflessly, it is viewed in Heaven as if he partially died in the Name of G-d--though he may, in the end, live a long and pleasant life and die of natural causes after 120 years! In the end, can there be any better way to live; can there be any better way to go?

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## Shabbos Day:

*The daughters of Tzelofchad, the son of Chepher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Menashe, from the family of Menashe son of Yosef, approached [Moshe]; these are their names: Machlah, No'ah, and Chaglah, and Milkah, and Tirtzah. They stood before Moshe, Eleazar the priest, and the princes, and the entire congregation by the entrance of the Appointed Tent, saying, "Our father died in the desert, and was not part of the ones who convened against G-d with Korach's group, but*

*instead he died because of his own transgression, and he had no sons. Why should the name of our father be eradicated from amongst his family because he didn't have sons? Give us [his] possession amongst the brothers of our father." Moshe brought their case before G-d. (Bamidbar 27:1-5)*

As the Torah testifies, an important law regarding the laws of inheritance is revealed as a result of the five daughters of Tzelofchad. The Midrash cites a few reasons for this, one being their love of Eretz Yisroel, and another being that Moshe sounded somewhat over-confident when he told the people that all unresolved questions could be brought to him.

However, what is interesting is the fact that the posuk above traces the daughter's ancestry back to Yosef HaTzaddik, especially since the parshah begins with an allusion to Pinchas' own ancestral connection to Yosef:

... Do you mean to say that Pinchas is a descendant of Yosef? What about the verse, *"Elazar son of Aharon married one of the daughters of Putiel ..."* (Shemos 6:26). Does not the name "Putiel" refer to Yisro, who used to fatten (peetem) calves for purposes of idol worship? No! The name "Putiel" refers to Yosef who conquered (putt-peit) his yetzer hara. But did the tribes not disgrace Pinchas by saying to him, "Look at the son of Puti, whose mother's father fattened calves for idol worship--should he execute a prince of the tribe of Israel?" (see Rashi on Bamidbar 25:11). Rather, if his mother's father was a descendant of Yisro, then his mother's mother was from Yosef; and if his mother's father was from Yosef, then his mother's mother was from Yisro. (Sotah 43a)

In fact, this inclusion of Yosef's "blood" in Pinchas' lineage may have saved his life. For, Pinchas was from the tribe of Levi, and Zimri, whom he killed, was from the tribe of Shimon. It was Shimon and Levi who went into Shechem together after the latter had performed Bris Milah, and wiped out the entire town in a mistaken act of zealotry (Bereishis 34:25). For this error in judgment, Ya'akov criticized them heavily:

*"Shimon and Levi are brothers. Their means of acquisition are instruments of violence. My spirit will not enter into their councils; my honor, do not be identified in their assemblies. For in their anger they murdered men, and of their own free will they maimed an ox. Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their frenzy, for it is harsh. I will divide them throughout Ya'akov, and will disperse them throughout Israel."* (Bereishis 49:5-7)

As Rashi points out, Korach, a Levi as well and self-appointed champion of the people, is alluded to by the words, "My spirit will not enter into their councils; my honor, do not be identified in their assemblies." Ya'akov was issuing a warning to the descendants of Shimon and Levi: be zealous, but be deliberate as well; apparently, Korach did not heed the advance warning of his great ancestor.

Nor did Zimri, it seems. However, Pinchas did, and for this he is greatly rewarded at the beginning of this week's parshah:

*"... Therefore, I give him My 'Covenant of Peace.' The covenant of the priesthood will be his and his*

*descendants forever, because he was zealous for his G-d, and atoned for the children of Israel."*

What essential trait did Yosef possess that Pinchas and the daughters of Tzelofchad inherited, which led to their greatness?

Patience. In fact, one of the outstanding features of the daughters of Tzelofchad that made them appear so wise, says the Midrash, was that, even though they were concerned about their father's name and portion within Israel before this week's parshah, they bided their time until Moshe's Bais Medrash began to deal with the issue of inheritance of the land. This allowed Moshe to better appreciate the importance of their question, and to devote his attention to the issue.

Pinchas, too, says the Midrash, could not have afforded to act impulsively. As it was, it took 12 miracles to make him successful (Sanhedrin 82b); reckless zealousness would only have increased the need for more miracles. Furthermore, he never complained about being left out of the priesthood once, and accepted his lowly position, never realizing that he was destined to become the very example of the priesthood later in his life--and Eliyahu the prophet for that matter (Targum Yonason; Ba'al HaTurim).

Why is patience such a virtue when it comes to Torah-living? Because, implicit in such patience is trust in G-d's fairness, and the belief that "all that G-d does He does for the best." Such patience can only exist when one understands that G-d has a master plan for creation, and that "all is for the good," whether we can see this at the time or not. This is why Yosef was able to withstand the test of 22 years while being a slave in Egypt.

It was impulsive behavior that caused Shimon and Levi to destroy Shechem when their father had decided to refrain. It was reckless zealousness that led Korach to try to usurp the priesthood from Aharon HaKohen, and, his inevitable downfall. And, it was impulsive behavior that led Zimri to take Cozbi and challenge Moshe's authority.

In fact, one of the yetzer hara's greatest weapon against us is the philosophy, "Shoot first and ask questions later"--when, of course, it is too late to do anything about the mistake. "Don't think too deeply into an issue before acting," whispers the yetzer hara, because it knows that if you do, you might come to see the flaw in your approach and realize that what appears at first to be an act for G-d is, in actuality, an act against G-d!

Feelings of zealousness can be deceiving and misguided.

To conquer the yetzer hara, as Yosef HaTzaddik and later, Pinchas did is to conquer impulsiveness, and to be "deliberate in judgment" (Pirkei Avos 1:3). And, it was Tzelofchad's daughters' patience and trust in G-d's master plan for the people that bound them to their great ancestor, Yosef HaTzaddik, and in the end, guaranteed them an eternal portion in an eternal "land flowing with milk and honey"--two important symbols of the most sublime Torah wisdom.

## SEUDAH SHLISHI:

*Moshe asked G-d, "Let G-d, the G-d of all living spirits, appoint a man over the congregation, who may go out and come in before them, who may lead them out, and who may bring them in. The Congregation of G-d should not be like a flock which has no shepherd." (Bamidbar 27:15-17)*

The Midrash on this week's parshah says that what bothered Moshe was that a leader might be chosen to replace him who would not be sympathetic to every individual of the Jewish people. Just like no two snowflakes are a like, no two people are alike, and a leader has to be able to relate to each individual on his or her own level. Otherwise, it is as if the flock "has no shepherd."

The Midrash also explains that Moshe was concerned that the next leader be one who could uphold the often tenuous relationship between G-d and the Jewish people, and created a parable to explain this point: It is a like a king who married a queen who came with a courtier. This courtier understood the king better than the queen did, and when the king became angry with the queen, the courtier knew how to mitigate the king's anger and restore peace in the palace.

One day, when the courtier was about to die, he begged the king to appoint another in his place who could do as he had done, "brokering" peace between the king and the queen. Instead, the king answered him, "Rather than I find another like you, instead, teach the queen to show me the proper respect, and this will maintain peace forever!"

So, too, the Midrash concludes, G-d told Moshe: You are worried that the next leader should know how reduce My anger as you have done on several occasions until now? Instead, command the Jewish people to show Me the proper and due respect, and they will never need a third party to act on their behalf! This is why the Torah follows with:

G-d told Moshe, "Command the children of Israel to be careful to offer My Fire-Offerings for a pleasing fragrance to Me in its proper time." (Bamidbar 28:1-2)

As the rabbis point out, G-d does not need our sacrifices, In fact, the Midrash says, if G-d ever actually needed to eat, He wouldn't depend upon us, because man can be so cruel oftentimes! So then why does the Torah command us "to be careful to offer" G-d's Fire-Offerings? Because we need to offer sacrifices to G-d, or, in our times, prayer to G-d, because this is one of the crucial ways we build the proper respect for G-d (each person according to his ability).

The more we are able to do this, and the better we perform the prayer service, which means treating prayer times with the utmost respect, and putting a full-heart into what we are saying, the less we will need to mitigate the anger of G-d; the more blessing we will receive. And, this is what Jewish leadership is very much about: instilling respect for G-d and His Torah in one's congregation, and being an example of this for all.

## Melave Malkah:

*G-d told Moshe, "The land will be divided among the people according to the number of names. To the numerous you will give a larger inheritance, and to the few you will give a smaller inheritance. To each, the inheritance will be given according to those counted with him. Nevertheless, inherited properties shall be given to paternal families by way of lottery. Regardless of whether the group is large or small, the inherited property must be divided by way of lottery." (Bamidbar 26:52-56)*

Another word for inheritance in Hebrew is "nachalah." There. That is my springboard to do something I rarely do, and that is, to use a weak connection to discuss something that is only remotely related to the parshah--but on the minds of many people who have written to me over the weeks.

It turns out that the word "nachalah" also means a "spring" of water, the idea being that inheritances "flow" from generation to generation like a river. However, I am more interested this time in the real thing, and the water that seems to be, well, leaking out from under the mosque on the Temple Mount.

In the beginning, there was only rumor. Getting confirmation of this intriguing occurrence was difficult, especially since the Arabs were not interested in going public with this one. Furthermore, in light of all the political-leaks these days, the secular Israeli media finds little reason to report on a water-leak, and on Arab property yet.

However, through a bizarre act of Divine Providence this week, I was actually able to speak to someone who has the inside scoop. Yes, the Temple mount is actually leaking. Yes, the Arabs are very concerned about it, and have even sectioned off the area into which the water is emerging (there are big fans set up to reduce moisture and dry carpets). Yes, they have even hired foreign engineers to solve the crisis, but to not avail, and for reasons they don't understand as of yet.

Of course, any sign of trouble for those who occupy the holiest place in the Jewish world--and the entire universe for that matter--is a long-awaited one for those yearning for Moshiach and Temple times. However, beyond such expectations, does the water have any meaning? If the water was the result of Arab excavations (now why would they be digging around there?), is that reason to raise a spiritual eyebrow in wonderment? Perhaps, when one considers the following:

*"Then He returned me to the entrance of the House and behold! Water was coming out from under the threshold of the House to the east--for the House faced east--and the water was descending under the right hand wall of the House, south of the altar ..." (Yechezkel 47:1)*

It is worthwhile to read the entire quote. According to the Talmud (Pesachim 22a), a stream used to flow through the Azarah (Interior Courtyard of the Temple), and its source was Ein Etam (Yerushalmi,

Yoma 3:8); it continued to the Kidron Valley. However, Rebi Eliezer ben Ya'akov teaches that, at a future date (i.e., the time of Moshiach), this stream will be replaced by one coming out of the Holy of Holies on the Temple Mount. (My source, call him "Deep Water," told me that the wall on our side of the Temple Mount that supposedly corresponds to the Holy of Holies has been unusually moist!) In the time of Moshiach, this small stream will become a mighty torrent of blessing for all mankind, even sweetening the Dead Sea, and healing the sick and providing food for all. This is one flow we will not go against!

What to make of all of this? That is the \$64,000 question that may be answered over the coming months. In the meantime, at least for those who have been wondering: There's water in them thar "hill"!

Have a great Shabbos,

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