

FRONT AND CENTER

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

The daughters of Tzelofchad . . . came forward . . . They stood before Moshe and before Elazar HaKohen and before the chief . . . (Bamidbar 27:1)

This is one of the other Eretz Yisroel parshios. This is the parshah in which the daughters of Tzelofchad approach Moshe Rabbeinu requesting a portion in the Land of Israel. Moshe is forced to turn to God for a ruling in their case, since their father had died and left no sons, which in turn leads to a discussion about the laws of land inheritance.

What was unique about Bnos Tzelofchad? For one, they are mentioned in the Torah. It was not common for someone living at the time to make their way into Torah history by actual name. It's not like being mentioned in a regular book or a newspaper article. Neither are eternal expressions of the will of God, nor blueprints of Creation. Torah is both.

It may seem like no big deal, but that's only if you look at the Torah like a typical history book, merely reporting significant events as they occurred. Torah is something very different. Every letter in the Torah is a channel for Divine light. Part of the miracle is, how something so mystical and Kabbalistically complex can be broken up into logical narration and exactly 613 mitzvos.

This is why Torah can be so deceiving. If you walk into a state-of-the-art nuclear plant, you will see all kinds of computerized and mechanized systems. The only story they will tell is about nuclear energy and the need for extreme safety regulations. The story won't be told through words, but through design and construction.

If, however, after reading a book, someone told you that you just toured a nuclear reactor, you would assume he is joking, weird, or both. There is nothing about a book that even comes close to suggesting that there is anything nuclear about it.

Likewise, if after touring an actual reactor the guide turned to you and said, "Did you enjoy the story that the reactor told you about life, morality, and how to maximize your personal potential?" You would question his sense of reality as well. A nuclear reactor may tell its own story, in a manner of speaking, but that is about it.

The Torah is incredibly different. It chronicles the history of the world and that of the Jewish people. It presents and explains 613 mitzvos where they belong in sequence. It contains poetry, and is even read according to a very specific cantillation. For all intents and purposes, it is but a literally work.

Yet, Torah can be learned on four levels, from the simple to the Kabbalistic. It is literally the blueprint for Creation and alludes to the spiritual structure of Creation. If one could see the spiritual world, he would see what might look like fiber optic cables spanning between Heaven and the words of the Torah itself. It is a spiritual nuclear reaction for all of Creation.

Which is it? Is Torah just a literary work, or is it a superstructure? Miraculously, it is both. To be mentioned in it, and even more so to be discussed by Torah, is far more than just honorable mention. It is to be considered part of the very fabric of Creation, but on a personal level. It is to be labeled as someone living on a whole different level of existence than most other people.

We're all in there. First of all, the letters of the Torah are the basis for all Jewish souls. Secondly, if the Torah is the blueprint for all of Creation, by definition everything that exists or happens has to be in the Torah. So, on one level or another, everything is in the Torah, as it says:

Ben Bag Bag said: "Turn the Torah over and over for everything is in it." (Pirkei Avos 5:26)

So, just exactly where are the rest of us in the Torah? Once upon a time, a prophet could tell a person. Even as late as the Vilna Gaon and the eighteenth century, it was possible to find out, and he would do exactly that for just about anyone who asked him. The famous reference to the Gaon himself occurs at the end of Parashas Ki Seitzei, in the section talking about honest weights and measures.

The Torah states:

You shall have a full and honest weight, [and] a full and honest ephah measure, in order that your days will be prolonged on the land which God, your God, gives you. (Devarim 25:15)

The Hebrew words for "full weights" is "evven shlaimah," spelled Aleph-Bais-Nun and Shin-Lamed-Mem-Heh. According to the GR"A (an acronym for HaGaon Rebi Eliyah), the Aleph alludes to his first name, "Eliyahu," which also begins with an Aleph. The Bais-Nun spells the word "ben," or "son. Thus, the first word, "evven," is an allusion to, "Eliyahu, son of . . ."

Amazingly, the word "shlaimah" has exactly the same letters as the name "Shlomo," which was the name of Gaon's father's. Thus, the words "evven shlaimah" can be read, "Aleph," for "Eliyahu, "the son of Shlomo." When asked why "Eliyahu" was not spelled out in full, the GR"A answered that it was known that he would only reveal part of his Torah knowledge.

Finding one's "place" in Torah is crucial for understanding one's purpose in this world. For the GR"A, the fact that his name preceded the section about the war against Amalek, which comes before the section about settling the Land of Israel, meant that he was in the world to precipitate the Final Redemption.

The sefer "Kol HaTor" testifies to what extent he took his mission seriously. He taught students about the importance of returning to Eretz Yisroel and building up the country once again. He emphasized

the role they must play in facilitating kibbutz golios, or the ingathering of the exiles to Israel. He himself tried to make aliyah, but was mysteriously forced to return back to Vilna and not complete his journey.

Well, it was mysterious at least to people unfamiliar with the teachings of Kol HaTor. According to what it says in the sefer, when the GR"A left Vilna for the Holy Land, he was on the level of Moshiach Ben Yosef, the first of the two Moshiachs. On this level, he and his followers were supposed to set in motion the Final Redemption.

Along the way to Eretz Yisroel, however, his spiritual status changed. According to what it says in Kol HaTor, the GR"A spiritually ascended from the level of Moshiach Ben Yosef to that of Moshiach Ben Dovid, the final redeemer who will usher in the Messianic Era. Though the Jewish people and the world might have been ready for a Moshiach Ben Yosef, they were not yet prepared for a Moshiach Ben Dovid. This forced the GR"A to postpone, and then terminate his plan of aliyah.

What about the rest of us? We do not have someone on the level of the Vilna Gaon today who can tell a person which verse, or part of a verse, contains our name and purpose. Believe it or not, among the many things that exist online today, one is a site that makes such calculations. For those who are curious, this is the link: <http://www.shtaygen.co.il/?CategoryID=1735&ArticleID=8198>.

The real question is, what is it that causes a person to arise from amongst the masses and become unique enough to be directly mentioned in the Torah? Lots of important events have happened throughout history, but only a fraction of fraction get such public attention. What is the secret ingredient?

Zealousness. Not just any zealousness, but a particular type of zealousness, the kind that Pinchas and the Bnos Tzelofchad exemplify. The kind where the truth matters more than you do, to the point that you are willing to sacrifice whatever is necessary, small or big, to maintain the truth.

Now comes the tricky part. Mass murders occur just about every week in the name of truth, or God, which is the same thing. "Honor killings" take place constantly in countries such as Pakistan in the name of truth. Even though the perpetrators may have a point to make, they are clearly making it the wrong way. They dream of Heaven, but they will end up in Gehinom instead.

They all make a fundamental mistake. The most important part about loving truth is making the sacrifice to learn it. Before you can be a truth doer you have to be a truth seeker and truth finder. Anyone can kill or die in the name of truth, but only the knowledgeable can actually do it. They are the true zealots in life, the people who spend their days honing their understanding of Ultimate Truth.

The Rambam asks why it is that a convert brings a Sin Offering after converting. Hasn't he done the right thing? For what sin does he atone?

The answer can be summed up as follows:

Welcome to the Jewish people. What took you so long?

After all, God endowed all of mankind with a tremendous brain and capacity to seek out truth and understand it. Just look at what man's brain has done in the fields of science and technology alone. It is more than remarkable.

It is also incriminating. God tends to remember all of our successes in life and uses them to eliminate all of our excuses on our final day of judgment. For every reason a person will give for falling short spiritually, God will show the individual how the same thing did not stop them when it came to succeeding materially.

Do you want to be center and front in God's Torah? Devote yourself to better understanding God's truth. Once you've got a good handle on that, be sure to make it top priority in your life. Then you'll have the Torah's attention, which will be only too happy to "talk" about you as well.