

# TYING GENERATIONS TOGETHER

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

The Torah records for us the genealogy of Pinchas, the true and justified zealot of Jewish history. There are many reasons advanced as to why the Torah felt impelled to tell us of the names of his father and grandfather. Many commentators saw in this an explanation to justify Pinchas' behavior while others emphasized that it was an explanation for Pinchas' reward and God granting him the blessing of peace.

But aside from these insights there is another more general message that the Torah is recording for us. And that is that a person's behavior affects all of one's family members, even those of previous generations who may no longer be currently numbered among the living.

A great act of sanctification of God's name such as the one performed by Pinchas enhances the reputations and stature of previous generations as well. My rebbe in the yeshiva summed this lesson up in his usual concise and pithy manner: "If both your grandparents and your grandchildren are proud of you and your achievements then you are probably alright in Heaven's judgment as well."

Our idea of immortality is based upon generations of our families, both previous generations and later ones. We find vindication of our lives and efforts in the accomplishments of those that come after us and continue our values and faith. We cannot control what children and grandchildren will do, whom they will marry and what type of life they will lead. But innately, we feel that we have a connection to the development of their lives and the actions that they will take.

The Torah emphasizes for us that Pinchas' zealotry did not come to him in a vacuum. The Torah allows everyone freedom of will and behavior. Neither good behavior nor evil behavior is ever predestined. Yet as medicine has shown us, in the physical world there is an element of physical predestination in our DNA. And this DNA affects our moral behavior as well.

Judaism always envisioned itself not only as a universal faith but as a particular family as well. In our daily prayer service we constantly recall who our founding ancestors were. We name our children in memory of those who have preceded us. We extol a sense of family and a loyalty to the values that our families represent.

One of the most destructive trends in modern society has been the erosion of the sense of family in the world and amongst Jews particularly. Assimilation means abandoning family and abandoning family certainly contributes to intensified assimilation and loss of Jewish feelings and identity. It is ironic that in a time such as now when most children can be privileged to know grandparents and

even great grandparents the relationship between generations in many Jewish families is frayed and weak.

Pinchas comes therefore to reinforce this concept of tying generations - past, present and future - together. It is imperative for us to know Pinchas' genealogy for otherwise we have no clue as to who Pinchas was and why he behaved as he did in those given circumstances.

Shabat shalom,  
Rabbi Berel Wein

Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)