

PICTURE THE SCENE OF THE PETITION OF TZELOFCHAD'S DAUGHTERS

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Pinchas

Picture The Scene of The Petition of Tzelofchad's Daughters

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 645, Women and Bentching. Good Shabbos!

The story of Tzelofchad's daughters appears in our parsha: *"The daughters ... stood before Moshe and before Elazar the Kohen, and before the leaders and the entire assembly at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, saying: 'Our father died in the wilderness, but he was not amongst the assembly that was gathering against Hashem in the assembly of Korach, rather he died of his own sin; and he had no sons. Why should the name of our father be omitted from among his family because he had no son? Give us a possession among our father's brothers.'" [Bamidbar 27:1-4].*

Although Moshe was the supreme judge and ruler amongst the Jewish people, he did not rule on this petition by himself, but he rather brought the request directly before the Almighty. Hashem ruled in favor of the petition of the daughters of Tzelofchad: *"You shall surely give them a possession of inheritance among the brothers of their father..." [Bamidbar 27:7]*

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin asked why Moshe found it necessary to take this question to the Ribono shel Olam. Was it such a difficult question that he did not feel qualified to answer it himself? And, if for some reason Moshe felt uncomfortable handling the question on his own, why didn't he seek the counsel of 70 elders who could have been called upon to deliberate and come up with a definitive legal ruling in the case?

Rav Sorotzkin argues that a careful reading of the pasukim [verses] here will answer both questions. First of all, the sisters stress: "Our father died in the wilderness, but he was not part of the Korach rebellion." In others words, they are emphasizing to Moshe that their father was a most loyal

supporter. Based on this plea -- to come to the aid of the unfortunate plight of the offspring of a loyal supporter, Moshe Rabbeinu felt that he was a "noge'ah b'davar" -- his impartiality in the matter might be compromised by personal considerations.

That explains why Moshe recused himself from the case. However, what about the 70 Elders? Why could they not give judgment in the matter?

Rav Sorotzkin explains that this is explained by picturing the scene portrayed by our pasukim: "They came before Moshe and before Elazar the Kohen, and before the leaders and before the entire assembly." This was not a court appearance. They did not go into Beis Din. They were five sisters, the youngest of which was over 40. None of them were married. Nor did they have any dowries. They were pleading to be given a portion of their father's estate.

Imagine this: Five unmarried sisters who desperately need shidduchim come in front of the entire nation and start crying that they were not given an inheritance! Who among the Elders would be willing to take on this case and rule "Sorry, you women don't get a portion in the Land!"

Therefore, Moshe Rabbeinu recused himself because he had a personal interest (they were the daughters of a loyalist follower); and it was too politically ticklish to ask the judges to rule on the matter. Therefore, he brought their case straight to the All Merciful Father in heaven. His ruling would be acceptable to everyone. Even if He would rule "No", no one would have complaints that the All Merciful was not merciful enough.

Tolerance Is The Key Ingredient to Rabbinic Leadership

Later in the parsha, Moshe is told to prepare himself for death. *"Go up to the mountain of Avarim and see the land that I have given to the Children of Israel. You shall see it and you shall be brought to your people..."* [Bamidbar 27:12-13]

Hearing this news, Moshe realized that the time had come to pick a successor. He asked Hashem: *"May, Hashem, G-d of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the assembly..."* [Bamidbar 27:16]

I have a friend in the rabbinate in the NY area. His name is Rabbi Yaakov Luban. Before he entered the rabbinate, he went to the Spinka Rebbe and asked for advice upon entering the rabbinate. Rabbi Luban asked, "What is the most important thing a Rav should know?"

The Spinka Rebbe took out a Chumash and read him this parsha: "May, Hashem, G-d of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the assembly..." Rashi notes that this pasuk uses a peculiar expression found virtually nowhere else in Torah. Where else do we ever find Hashem referred to as "G-d of the spirits of all flesh"? What is the connotation of this expression?

Rashi explains: Moshe said before Him, "Master of the World! The personality of each individual is revealed before You; they do not resemble one another. Appoint a leader who can put up with each individual according to his personality." You, G-d, know better than any human that no two people on

this planet are exactly the same. Every person thinks differently, acts differently and reacts differently than every other person. Therefore, I ask You to appoint a leader who will have patience with and be able to tolerate each person according to the needs of that person's individual personality.

The Spinka Rebbe told Rabbi Luban that the key to success in the Rabbinate is to be able to tolerate (be 'sovel') the personality needs of each and every individual. One does not need to agree with every one else's point of view. As a matter of fact, a Rabbi should generally NOT agree with every one else's point of view. He should lead, not follow. *"He should go out before them and come in before them..."* [26:17]. But he must be able to tolerate every single individual -- even those with opinions diametrically opposed to his own.

There is a common expression -- "I can't be 'sovel' this person" -- which means "he drives me up a wall -- I can't stand him!" These words cannot come from the lips of a Jewish leader. A leader must be 'sovel' the opinions and personality of each and every one of his followers.

The Kotzker Rebbe (Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk) asked why the portion dealing with appointment of Moshe's successor appears at exactly this point in Chumash, in Parshas Pinchas. Why, he asks, is it not found towards the end of Sefer Devarim, perhaps in Parshas VaYelech?

The Kotzker Rebbe answers that Moshe Rabbeinu did not wake up one day and discover that he needed to have a successor. For a very long time, he had a strong opinion of who the next leader of Israel should be. He thought his heir apparent was Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aharon the Kohen.

Then the incident occurred in Shittim, at the end of Parshas Balak. Pinchas took a sword in his hand and he was jealous on G-d's behalf. His act of zealotry saved the Jewish nation. He stopped the plague. He was given the Covenant of Peace. What a great resume he had!

However, at that point, Moshe realized that Pinchas could not be the leader. The zealot cannot tolerate the foibles of every mortal. The zealot does not say "I hear what you have to say. I may disagree, but I understand what you are saying." He acts on his convictions. He takes a sword in his hand.

Is zealotry sometimes necessary? Yes. Can a zealot be the High Priest? Yes. But can he be the leader, the Rabbi of Israel? The answer is no. That he cannot be.

So it was appropriate that right here in Parshas Pinchas, Moshe turned to Hashem and told him "I need someone to succeed me and I need to move on to 'Plan B'. My first plan, that Pinchas would be the next leader of the Jewish people, will not work. This is not a job for him. What I need is someone who will serve in the Image of the "G-d of the spirits of all flesh". I need someone who appreciates, can live with, and work with all individuals, people with totally disparate spirits, interests, and personalities.

This, the Spinka Rebbe told Rabbi Yaakov Luban, is the most important thing for a person entering the rabbinate to realize.

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Transcribed by David Twersky; Seattle, WA DavidATwersky@aol.com Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org