

# REVENGE OF A TALMID CHOCHOM / THINKING DIFFERENTLY / REWARDING EFFORT

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: CD #953 – My Hosts Haven't Toiveled Their Dishes. Good Shabbos!

---

**Please Note:** The shiurim will resume after the summer break - with Parshas Shoftim. Archives of shiurim, including some from the upcoming summer parshios are available at <http://torah.org/series/ravfrand/>.

---

## The Revenge of A Talmid Chochom Must Be Like A Snake

The parsha begins: "Hashem spoke to Moshe saying: Pinchas son of Elazar, son of Aharon the Kohen turned back My wrath from upon the Children of Israel, when he zealously avenged My vengeance among them, so I did not consume the Children of Israel in My vengeance." [Bamidbar 25:10-11] Rashi wonders why the Torah needs to restate the genealogy of Pinchas, given that we know it already from what we read just three pesukim earlier, at the end of Parshas Balak.

Rashi explains: "Because the tribes were humiliating him, saying 'Did you see this son of Puti whose mother's father fattened calves for idolatry, yet he killed the prince of a tribe of Israel! This is why the Torah traces his ancestry to Aharon.'" Murmurers and critics within Israel chastised Pinchas for his "unmitigated chutzpah". He dared to kill the prince of the Tribe of Shimon even though Pinchas himself descended from Yisro who at one time in his life was a priest of idolatry. Therefore, the Torah goes out of its way to reiterate that we should trace Pinchas' lineage through his father's side back to Aharon haKohen (rather than through his mother's side back to Yisro).

Rav Yisrael Grossman wrote an article in the Yeshurun publication that adds a bit of a commentary to this Rashi. He writes that Rav Chaim Soloveitchik had a life-long inquisitive inquiry (chakirah) that he never resolved. The chakira was as follows:

When a fellow gets up in shul and reads the Torah (leins) and he makes a mistake and everyone

pounces on him – how do we interpret this scenario? Is it because we were all there at "ma'amad Har Sinai" [the presentation of the Torah on Mount Sinai] and we heard the Torah from the Almighty with perfect clarity, so we became hard-wired such that our spiritual DNA needs to hear Torah correctly and when we hear Torah misread it goes against every sinew of our spiritual essence? Is that why we (for example) protest loudly "No, you read the word without pronouncing the dot in the Hay at the end of the word!" Is that why we do it?

Alternatively, do we interpret this like a game of chicken? Got yah! Perhaps we simply do not like the Baal Koreh (He leans too fast or too slow or we do not like his trop or we do not like his voice.) or we want to show how fast we are (at catching errors) or how smart we are or if we just like to "win". None of the reasons in this second group of possibilities is good.

In short – is it because we can't suffer hearing Torah read incorrectly (like a perfectionist musician who hears someone playing a violin off key) or is it because of hatred, jealousy, machlokes, or whatever other unseemly motive? Rav Yisrael Grossman writes – this too is what happened in the Torah's narrative with Pinchas.

Pinchas got up and killed Zimri. He was a zealot, fighting the "Battle of the L-rd". However, the people were cynical. "Agh! This was not a case of 'Battling for the L-rd'. This does not come from a good place. Pinchas is a murderer. He has these negative traits in his genes because his grandfather was an idolater. This was his opportunity to murder someone ostensibly for the 'right reason'".

G-d responded, "I am able to read people's hidden thoughts. I know the person who killed Zimri is Pinchas son of Elazar son of Aharon the Priest. His zealotry was purely for My sake. The genes that were active in carrying out this act of zealotry are those of his grandfather Aharon who was a lover of peace and a pursuer of peace. Wanton murder is not in his DNA at all! We witnessed a function of his devotion and zealotry for Me."

Rav Grossman buttresses his point with a Gemara [Yoma 23a] "Any Talmid Chochochom who does not seek revenge and bear a grudge like a snake is not a Talmid Chochochom." This Talmudic passage needs explanation, but the simple reading is that there are occasions when a Talmid Chochochom needs to take revenge. We are not talking about petty matters. Rather, sometimes a person needs to be put in his place. There are occasions where even a Talmid Chochochom needs to carry out acts of revenge.

It is noteworthy that the Gemara uses the simile "like a snake". What does that represent? Why does it not say "Any Talmid Chochochom that does not take revenge like a lion...?" Rav Grossman offers a beautiful insight. The Gemara [Arachin 15b] says that all the animals went to the snake and argued with him as follows: "We understand why a lion kills – a lion kills to eat. We understand why a wolf kills – a wolf kills to eat. Virtually all rapacious animals kill to satisfy their hunger. However, what kind of pleasure do you, Mr. Snake, get out of biting someone?"

We see from this Gemara that a snake does not bite for his own pleasure. The snake is not doing it to

fulfill its own need. That is what this Gemara means. Any Talmid Chochom who does not take revenge like a SNAKE, is not a true Talmid Chochom. When a Talmid Chochom takes revenge, it is NOT for his own pleasure. It must be LIKE A SNAKE, altruistic. Just as a snake does not derive pleasure or benefit when it attacks, so too the "revenge" of a Talmid Chochom must be one from which he derives no pleasure or benefit. A Talmid Chochom may only seek that kind of revenge.

This was the zealotry of Pinchas. It was not a result of bad character traits, but was strictly for the Sake of Heaven.

---

## **It is Normal for People to Think Differently**

Later on in the Parsha, Moshe asks Hashem to appoint an appropriate successor: "May Hashem, G-d of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the assembly..." [Bamidbar 26:6]. Rashi alludes to the Medrash Tanchuma, which comments, "Just as the faces of no two people are alike, so too the thought processes of no two people are alike – everyone has a mind of his own." The Medrash wonders why Moshe refers to the Almighty here as "G-d of the spirits" (Elokai haRuchos). This is a very rare expression for referring to the Master of the Universe. What does it mean?

The Medrash explains: Moshe, as the time of his death approached, turned to the Almighty and said "Master of the Universe it is known and revealed to You that everyone has a mind of his own, with different wants and needs. The Jewish people need a new leader, but You know as well as I do that they are a tough crowd. They are very opinionated and everyone has their own philosophy. They need a leader who can relate to every single person, to each individual and to his or her own way of looking at life." This is why Moshe refers to G-d as Elokai haRuchos. You, who know the spirit of every person and how different they each are, please appoint a leader who is able to deal with the different spirits of people.

The Medrash began by saying "Just as their faces are not alike (so too their opinions are not alike)." Reb Bunim Eiger asks – why does the Medrash start out like that? We all know that people do not look alike. Why not just come right to the point: "People's opinions are different from one another; their philosophies are different." Why do we need the preamble "Just like their faces are not alike...?"

Reb Bunim Eiger answers (with a question): "Did it ever bother you that the person sitting next to you does not look like you?" Look around this room. No two people look the same. Does that bother anyone? The Gemara states that it is one of the wonders of creation that of all the billions of people born since the beginning of time, no two people look exactly alike. It does not bother anyone one iota.

The Medrash is saying "It does not (and it should not) bother anyone that his face is not like anyone else's face, so why when people think differently and look at life differently do people find it so

bothersome?" Why is it that we feel 'If you do not see it my way, you are an idiot?' The Medrash is teaching that it should NOT bother us that people think differently from one another.

---

## **He Who Guards The Fig Tree Shall Eat Its Fruit**

The sefer Chashukei Chemed on Maseches Sukkah quotes a very interesting halachic novelty from the Aderes (Rav Eliyahu Dovid Rabinowitz Tumim; the father-in-law of Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook).

Rashi says that when Moshe heard the Almighty say "Give Tzelophchad's inheritance to his daughters", Moshe said, "The time has come that I should claim what I need (i.e. – that I should think of my family) that my sons should inherit my high position." The Holy One, Blessed is He, said to Moshe, "This is not what has entered My mind. Yehoshua is worthy of taking reward for his service for 'he would not depart from within the tent.'" The Medrash applies the pasuk "He who guards the fig tree shall eat its fruit" [Mishlei 27:18] (i.e. – he who keeps watch over his master shall be honored).

Yehoshua bin Nun who was so faithful, who put in the time, who did everything for his master – he is the person deserving to become the successor of his master.

The Aderes writes the following halachic chiddush [novelty] addressing the case where one has Yahrtzeit for his grandfather and wants to daven for the amud, but there is no minyan present. (The rule is that strictly speaking a grandson is not a 'chiyuv' [one with primary responsibility] to 'daven at the amud' [lead the prayer quorum] on his grandfather's Yahrtzeit. However, if there is no other 'chiyuv' present, it is a nice thing to do for the grandson to lead the service.) The grandson goes outside and announces to passersby "Mincha! Mincha!" He still cannot get a minyan together. He goes to people's houses and knocks on the doors. Finally, he gets a minyan together. He is about to go to the amud and a new fellow walks into shul who announces, "I have Yahrtzeit for my father. I have priority for davening at the amud."

The Aderes ruled that in such a case, the grandson gets priority to lead the service since he is responsible for there being a minyan. The Aderes applies the principle that "He who guards the fig tree shall eat its fruit". Even though strictly speaking the Yahrtzeit for one's father is a "bigger chiyuv", but that does not push away someone with a "smaller chiyuv" who went to great trouble to make the minyan possible.

The Magen HaElef on the Mateh Ephraim cites another scenario we also see frequently. The custom is that when we there is a public Torah reading, the Baal Koreh [one who read the Torah] recites the Kaddish after the Torah reading. If a person, who has Yahrtzeit, wants to say Kaddish as many times as he can, he might say to the Baal Koreh "I want to say the Kaddish after the Torah reading". The Mateh Ephraim writes that the Baal Koreh has no obligation to give up the privilege of saying Kaddish after the Torah reading. He leined, so by right that Kaddish goes to him! Here again, we

apply the pasuk "He who guards the fig tree shall eat its fruit."

---

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com  
Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org

---

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Pinchas is provided below:

- # 064 - The Yarmulka: At Home and In the Office
- # 154 - Writing a Halachically Sanctioned Will
- # 201 - Fasting on Tisha B'Av: Is It For Everyone?
- # 246 - Hilchos Brachos: Ikar Ve Tofel
- # 291 - The Do's and Don't of Kashering Keilim
- # 336 - Tisha B'Av on Motzoei Shabbos
- # 381 - Making A Zecher Le'churban
- # 425 - Minhagim of the Three Weeks
- # 469 - Tu B'Av
- # 513 - Leining on Fast Days and Other Ta'aneisim Issues
- # 557 - Disinheriting
- # 645 - Women and Bentching
- # 688 - A Manicure on Shabbos?
- # 732 - Does A Mezuzah Need a Door?
- # 776 - Yayin Mevushal - Does It Exist?
- # 821 - Cholent on Sunday of the Nine Days
- # 865 - Neckties, Shoelaces and Tichels: A Knotty Problem
- # 909 - Shabbos Shacharis - Hashkama Vs Later
- # 953 - Tevilas Keilim: My Hosts Haven't Toiveled Their Dishes
- # 995 - The Mitzva of Shiluach Ha'Kain - Do We Make A Bracha?
- #1040 - Learning on Tisha B'av? Saying Tehilim on Tisha B'Av?
- #1084 - The Kohain Who Killed Someone by Accident: Can He Still "Duchan"?
- #1127 - Tei'ku - What Will Eliyahu Answer?
- #1169 - 17 Tamuz-When Does It Start? Wearing Laundered Shirts In Nine Days?
- #1212 - Goral: Can You Have A Raffle For A Sefer Torah?

A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511.

Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail [tapes@yadyechiel.org](mailto:tapes@yadyechiel.org) or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further

