

PARSHAS PINCHAS: AN INDIVIDUAL'S ABILITY TO STAND UP AND BE COUNTED

by Rabbi Yaakov Horowitz

This week's parsha begins with the incident of Pinchas and the zealous actions that he took - killing Zimri as he was sinning with a woman from Midyan. The Torah relates how the sins the Jews committed with the women of Midyan caused a plague which resulted in 24,000 deaths.

Following the cessation of the plague, (which ended when Pinchas stepped forward and defended the honor of the Jews), Hashem once again instructed Moshe to take a census of the B'nei Yisroel. Rashi explains that conducting a count of the Jews at this point of time is a logical thing to do - similar to the actions of a shepherd whose flock of sheep is attacked by predatory animals. As soon as he stabilizes his flock, he counts them to ascertain the extent of the damage.

In a seemingly unrelated manner, the Torah then relates the interesting halachic question raised by the daughters of Tzafchad. They approached Moshe and related that their father had died in the Midbar - leaving no sons. They asked, "Why should the name of our father be omitted from among his family [by not passing his inheritance to his family members]? (Bamidbar 27:4).

Moshe brought their request to Hashem, and then informed them that they would, in fact, receive the portion allotted to their father. Rashi comments that the daughters of Tzafchad were rewarded for their love of Eretz Yisrael - by having an entire portion of the Torah devoted to their request and its resolution.

AN INTERESTING MIDRASH

The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah) notes that the daughters of Tzafchad followed in the footsteps of our greatest Avos (Forefathers) by standing tall to defend Hashem's Torah - and by defying the conventional wisdom of their generation. As a result, they received the reward that was reserved for all the people of their time period.

The Midrash compares these women to Noach who stood against the generation of the flood and to Avraham who stood against the generation of the tower of Babel. So too, the daughters of Tzafchad displayed their love for Eretz Yisroel and approached Moshe at the time when the rest of Bnei Yisroel were asking to "Appoint a leader and return to Egypt".

Just as Noach and Avraham received the reward designated for the entire generation, so too did the daughters of Tzafchad obtain a disproportionate remuneration for displaying their love for Eretz

Yisroel.

OUR PORTION

Years ago, when I served as an eighth grade rebbi, I would often explain the tefilah, "V'sein chelkaynu b'Torasecha (when we ask Hashem to give us âour portion' in His Torah)" with an incident that took place in my childhood.

My parents were invited to a wedding in an elaborate hall in New York City. There was a fierce snowstorm that evening, and my parents, who lived near an underground subway, were among the few who were able to make it to the wedding. The next morning, they related to us how the father of the bride was practically begging people to enjoy the delicious food - and eat more than one portion - as more than two thirds of the guests could not make it to the wedding!

MAKING THE MOST OF AN OPPORTUNITY

In this light, the prayer to "receive OUR portion in the Torah" takes new meaning. Each person is afforded a portion in the Torah - and an opportunity to share in the reward reserved for those who fulfill it.

When a generation misses an opportunity to follow in the Torah's ways, others can step in and take the portion of all the people who squander their birthright.

The daughters of Tzafchad stepped forward in a similar situation. Their portion in Eretz Yisroel was about to be passed on to others in their Shevet (Tribe). They stepped forward and respectfully presented their case to Moshe - and received eternal reward for their actions.

AN INDIVIDUAL'S ABILITY TO STAND UP AND BE COUNTED

It is interesting to note how the counting of the Jews in Parshas Pinchas is bracketed by two very different approaches to sanctifying Hashem's name. A listing of more than 600,000 people leads one to mistakenly believe that there is only power in numbers.

The diverse actions of Pinchas and the âdaughters' teach us about the power of the individual.

Pinchas defended the honor of Hashem in a very public and personally dangerous fashion (see Rashi and others). The daughters of Tzafchad displayed their love for Eretz Yisroel in their understated - but very powerful - words.

Both are forever recorded in our Torah as examples of the importance of taking the proper course of action - regardless of the prevailing attitude of the masses.

May we be granted the zechus - and courage - to stand and be counted along with them.

Best wishes for a Gutten Shabbos

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