

United We Stand

Written By Yehuda Dov Reiss, Talmid of Gruss Kollel (YU Israel)

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Parshas Pinchas

21st of Tammuz 5784

The Parsha's Path

Let H', the G-d of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the community (27:16).

In this week's Parsha G-d informs Moshe that he is about to die and will not be able to enter the Land of Israel. Moshe requests that G-d appoint a successor to him who would lead the people into Israel and help conquer it. G-d instructs him to appoint his student, Yehoshua.

Rashi, citing Yalkut Shimoni, asks why Moshe addressed G-d using the unusual and seemingly superfluous expression, *G-d of the spirits of all flesh*. The midrash explains that Moshe alluded to the idea that G-d knows the unique temperament and sensitivities of every individual and is able to deal with each one appropriately. Likewise, he requested a leader that would also have this quality.

G-d responds to Moshe, "Take to yourself Yehoshua bin Nun, a man in whom there is spirit." Rashi explains that G-d was answering Moshe in the affirmative - Yehoshua had his finger on the spirits of all man and would be able to lead them accordingly.

Many commentators and scholars note that Moshe hitting instead of talking to the rock, which caused him not to be allowed to enter the land, was symptomatic of a broader leadership style which was at odds with the needs of the new generation that would go into Israel. In a very simplistic summary, Moshe knew how to lay down the law and be forceful, while the new generation needed a softer and more personable approach. Accordingly, we can understand that Moshe recognized the need for leadership that would understand each person's individual needs and know just how to address them.

This signature quality that Moshe sought for and that he found in Yehoshua should be a model of leadership and relating to others for all of us. As we become embroiled in communal and global issues that are so vital to our identities, we often are

overcome by a sense of justice or even victimhood, fighting for what we believe is right with a burning sharpness and condemning those we disagree with as enemies. While we may indeed be right, this is rarely the way to communicate and make progress. We must remember that unity and progress do not emerge from being right, but from trying to work with others, learning to understand and respect them, communicate in their language, and compromising when necessary to bring about the most mutually beneficial results. As much as our ideals can and should be absolute, we must acknowledge when it's impossible to implement them in practice and make the best of the reality before us. To that end, we must follow Yehoshua's example, sincerely and intently trying to appreciate every person and where they're coming from, and speak and work with them in a way that they can appreciate. Together we will win.

Deeper Meanings

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The name of the smitten (Huka) Israelite ... (25:14).

This week's Parsha records the aftermath of the episode at the end of last week's Parsha, when Pinchas zealously killed the sinful Zimri and Cozbi, who publicly and flagrantly engaged in a forbidden union. In fact, the Midianite women had lured many Jews into sin, and a plague had swept the Jews in punishment until Pinchas acted.

Baal HaTurim notes that the word *Huka-smitten*, appears three times throughout Tanach. Once here, once in Hoshea in reference to the destruction of the Ten Lost tribes, and once in Tehillim. That pasuk reads: *I am smitten like grass [by the sun] and my heart is withered, for I have forgotten to eat my bread.* He contends that this alludes to two ideas: (a) that because of the Midianites, the Jews were smitten like grass; and (b)

based on a homiletic read of the pasuk in Tehillim, where the latter half is read *for I have forgotten [G-d, and I have sinned] as a result of eating my food*, we see an allusion to food being the cause of the Jews' sinning with the Midianites.

This idea is explained in the Midrash: The Midianites (actually, according to the Midrash they were Moabites) would have one of their older women sit in front of their food shops in the marketplace. She would set up her tasty dishes and invite Israelites into her store to see what else she sold. Once the Israelite had entered, the Midianite/Moabite's youthful daughter would engage the Israelite in conversation, ultimately convincing him to have a meal with them. At the meal, she would pry him with wine (which, at the time, was not Halachically forbidden) until she could seduce him.

It thus becomes evident that the perfectly permissible pursuit of pleasure (food) led to the destruction of thousands among the Jewish people.

How can we understand this phenomenon? What was so wrong about looking to buy a bit of food, and what message are we to take away from it?

It seems that the problem lies not in the pursuit of pleasure itself, but where that pursuit was sought. As Chazal have emphasized time and again, one of the most important factors in directing our free will is situating ourselves in the right environment. When we allow ourselves to wander into potentially hazardous environments, even with the most innocent intents, we set ourselves up for our own downfall. What made the pursuit of a good meal so wrong was not the meal itself, but that those that pursued it allowed it to override considerations of the environments they were subjecting themselves to in order to attain it. This can be comparable to someone who is so determined to go on an enjoyable vacation that he travels to a place filled with immodesty. It is not that this individual necessarily desires the sinful aspects of such an environment, but he is indifferent to them in light of his other motivations. Such an attitude turns such motivations, while intrinsically acceptable, into the most notorious sins.

This idea extends far beyond considerations of where we vacation and where we eat. It applies

just as much to where we buy a home, where we get a job, what schools and camps we send our children to, what outings we take, and what clubs and organizations we join. On a more day to day level, it applies to where we spend our time during the day: are we putting ourselves in an environment of distractions, such as our TV or computer, or in the productive environs of the Beis Midrash? Even if one must put themselves in a position at a certain time of day when they will have access to a computer, perhaps the computer could be located in a place more conducive to productivity and will avoid distractions, such as a public area in the home. Even if one is forced to spend much of the day in an environment that is not the most conducive to a Torah lifestyle, maybe there is a private or controlled area one can spend more of his time where he can study Torah and reflect. So many situations and temptations can be avoided if we just care enough to try. Let us all strive to learn from the tragic incident with the Midianites and always stay as far as possible from potential pitfalls.

Goal of the week

Try to research and talk to people to understand a view you disagree with; even if you still don't agree with it, you'll have a better understanding of where they're coming from.

This week's bulletin is dedicated for a Refuah Sheleima for Shaindel Temma bas Rochel Zlotta, Masha Sarah bas Teiviah Leah, Reuven ben Golda, Ephraim Melech ben Teilah, Gavriel Margoliot Ben Malka, and all those injured by the war and acts of terror, as well as for the safe return of all the hostages and soldiers. Please have them in mind in your Tefillos.

Have A Great Shabbos !!

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