

The Parshah in a Nutshell

# Pinchas

*Numbers 25:10-30:1*

Aaron's grandson, **Pinchas**, is rewarded for his act of **zealotry** in killing the Shimonite prince **Zimri** and the Midianite princess: G-d grants him a **covenant of peace** and the priesthood.

A census of the people counts **601,730** men between the ages of 20 and 60. Moses is instructed on how the Land is to be divided by **lottery** among the tribes and families of Israel. The five **daughters of Tzelafchad** petition Moses that they be granted the portion of the land belonging to their father, who died without sons; G-d accepts their claim and incorporates it into the Torah's **laws of inheritance**.

Moses empowers **Joshua** to succeed him and lead the people into the Land of Israel. The Parshah concludes with a detailed list of the **daily offerings**, and the additional offerings brought on **Shabbat**, **Rosh Chodesh** (first of the month), and the festivals of **Passover**, **Shavuot**, **Rosh Hashanah**, **Yom Kippur**, **Sukkot** and **Shemini Atzeret**.



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# Pinchas

Numbers 25:10-30:1

## Summary & Commentary

Our Parshah opens with G-d saying to Moses:

*Pinchas, the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned My wrath away from the children of Israel, in that he was zealous for My sake among them; and I consumed not the children of Israel in my jealousy*

(As related in the closing verses of last week's Parshah, a plague had broken out among the people of Israel when they sinned with the daughters of Midian and worshiped the idol Pe'or; when Zimri, a Shimonite prince, took a Midianite

princess into his tent before the eyes of Moses and the people, Pinchas **killed** them both, stopping the plague.)

*Therefore say: Behold, I give to him My covenant of peace.*

*And it shall be to him, and his seed after him, the covenant of an everlasting priesthood...*

G-d then tells Moses to wage war against the Midianites, "For they are **enemies** to you, in their plottings against you

## Commentary

**killed:** *Pinchas the son of Elazar the son of Aaron (Numbers 25:10)*

Why does G-d refer to Pinchas as the "son of Elazar the son of Aaron"? Because the tribes of Israel were mocking him, saying, "Have you seen this son of the fattener, whose mother's father (Jethro) fattened calves for idolatrous sacrifices, and now he goes and kills a prince in Israel?" Therefore, G-d traces his lineage to Aaron. (Talmud, Sanhedrin 82b)

Few professions are as cruel and inhumane as the fattening of calves for slaughter. So when Pinchas slew Zimri, many said: "Look at this holy zealot! He acts as if motivated by the desire to avenge the honor of G-d and save the people, but, in truth, he has merely found a holy outlet for his cruel and violent nature. After all, it's in his blood--just look at his maternal grandfather..." So G-d described him as "Pinchas the son of Elazar the son of Aaron" in order to attest that in character and temperament he actually took after his paternal grandfather--the compassionate and peace-loving Aaron.

The true greatness of Pinchas lay in that he acted in complete opposition to his nature, transcending his inborn instincts to bring peace between G-d and Israel. (The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

*And it shall be to him, and his seed after him, the covenant of an everlasting priesthood (25:13)*

Although the priesthood had already been given to the descendants of Aaron, it was given only to Aaron, and his [four] sons who were anointed together with him, and to the children they would father after their anointing. Pinchas, however, who was born before that time and was not himself anointed, did not enter the priesthood until now. Thus we have learned in the Talmudic tractate of Zevachim (101b): "Pinchas did not attain the priesthood until he slew Zimri." (Rashi)

**enemies:** *For they are enemies to you, in their plottings against you on the matter of Pe'or (25:17)*

## Commentary

*Pinchas: I give to him My covenant of peace (25:12)*

Pinchas is Elijah.

Said G-d to Pinchas: You made peace between Israel and Me in this world, so, too, in the World to Come, it is you who shall make peace between Me and My children. As it is written (Malachi 3:23-24): "Behold, I will send you Elijah the Prophet, before the coming to the great and awesome day of G-d. And he will return the hearts of fathers to children, and the hearts of children to their fathers."

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When Pinchas entered Zimri's tent, thousands of members of the tribe of Shimon converged upon him to slay him, and his soul flew from his body in fright. At that moment, G-d sent the souls of Nadav and Avihu (Aaron's two eldest sons, who died on the day that the Sanctuary was dedicated--see Leviticus 10) and they entered into his body; at that moment, Pinchas became worthy to become the High Priest.... Thus the verse says of him, "Pinchas the son of Elazar the son of Aaron"--he was now both the son of Elazar as well as the son of Aaron... (Zohar; Me'am Loez)

on the matter of Pe'or, and the matter of their sister Kozbi, daughter of the prince of Midian, who was slain on the day of the plague..."

## Numbers and Lots

### Commentary

How do we know that one who causes a man to sin is even worse than one who kills him? ... Two nations advanced against Israel with the sword, and two with transgression. The Egyptians and the Edomites advanced against them with the sword, as is proven by the texts, "The enemy said: I will pursue, I will overtake... I will draw my sword" (Exodus 15: 9), "And Edom said unto him: You shall not pass through me, lest I come out with the sword against you" (Numbers 20:18). Two advanced against them with transgression, namely the Moabites and the Ammonites. Of those who had advanced against them with the sword it is written, "You shall not abhor an Edomite... You shall not abhor an Egyptian" (Deuteronomy 23:8). Of those, however, who had advanced against them with transgression, endeavoring to make Israel sin, it says, "An Ammonite or a Moabite shall not enter into the assembly of G-d... Even to the tenth generation shall none of them enter... for ever" (ibid. v. 4). (Midrash Rabbah)

**Lots:** the implication is that the Torah is insisting that two different--even conflicting--dynamics be involved in the apportionment of the land: a *rational* division, which takes into account empirical data such as population figures and the quality of the land; a *supra-rational* lottery, whose workings are beyond human comprehension and control.

There is also a third factor involved: the concept of "inheritance"--a word that appears repeatedly in these verses in connection with the apportionment of the Land. Inheritance is neither "rational" nor "supra-rational." An heir is not receiving a particular portion of land by some logical criteria or by some esoteric formula, but as his "birthright"--as something that is inexorably bound to his essence, something that belongs to him by virtue of who and what he is.

Our portion in life, says the Lubavitcher Rebbe, includes all three dynamics.

There are the events and opportunities which shape our lives, giving rise to decisions and choices on how best to fulfill our purpose. One man will choose to be a Torah scholar, another will ascertain the hand of Divine Providence pointing him to the business world, while a third will interpret a G-d-given talent as directing him to become an artist. This is the "rational" means by which we receive our "portion in the land."

But then there are the circumstances and experiences that "befall" us in a seemingly random and arbitrary manner. A person will often mistake these for "chance." But these are no less the hand of Divine Providence than the rational side of life. In fact, they express a more profound involvement by G-d in our lives--an involvement that is too lofty to be captured by any logical formula,

In the opening chapters of the book of Numbers, back in the Parshah of Bamidbar, we read of the census of Israel conducted one year after the Exodus. It is now 39 years later; that entire generation (i.e., those over the age of 20 at the time) has died out, and a new generation has grown up to enter the Promised Land in their stead. In the wake of the **plague** which Pinchas stopped, G-d instructs Moses and Elazar to conduct another count.

The total number of those counted -- men between the ages of 20 and 60, not counting the tribe of Levi -- was 601,730 (1,820 less than the previous census, which tallied 603,550).

The breakdown by tribes was as follows:

The tribe of Reuben, comprising the families Chanochi, Palu'i, Hetzroni and Carmi (descendent of Reuben's four sons -- Chanoch, Phalu, Hetzron and Carmi), numbered 43,730. (In the previous census, the tribe of Reuben numbered 46,500).

Shimon's sons generated the Nemueli, Yamini, Yachini, Zarchi and Shauli families, and the tribe totaled 22,200 (a **loss** of 37,100 from the previous count of 59,300).

### Commentary

so that our earthly eyes can perceive it only as an "arbitrary" casting of lots. These are gifts that are too potent to be tapped with the conventional tools of intellect and instinct; we can only open ourselves to their possibilities.

**plague:** *And it came to pass after the plague, that G-d spoke to Moses... "Take the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel..." (26:1)*

To what is this comparable? To a shepherd into whose flock there entered a wolf and killed many of them, so he counts them to know how many remain.

Another explanation: It is like the case of a shepherd to whom an owner entrusted his flock by number; when the shepherd came to the end of his time, on returning them, he had to number them again. When Israel went out of Egypt G-d entrusted them to Moses by number (as per Exodus 12:37 and Numbers 1:1); now that Moses was about to depart from the world in the plain of Moab, he returned them by number. (Midrash Rabbah; Rashi)

**loss:** *These are the families of the Shimonites: twenty two thousand and two hundred (26:14)*

The tribe of Gad (families: Zefoni, Haggi, Shuni, Ozni, Eiri, Arodi and Areli) = 40,500 (previous census, 45,650).

Judah (Sheilani, Partzi, Zarchi, Hetzroni, Chamuli) = 76,500 (previous census, 74,600).

Issachar (Tola'i, Puni, Yashuvi, Shimroni) = 64,300 (up from 54,400).

Zebulun (Sardi, Eloni, Yachle'eli) = 60,500 (previous census, 57,400).

The tribe of Menasseh included the Machiri, Giladi, E'ezri, Chelki, Asrieli, Shicmi, Shmida'i and Chefri; the verse also mentions here that, "Tzelafchad, the son of Chefer, had no sons, but only daughters; and the names of the daughters of Tzelafchad were: Machlah, Noah, Chaglah, Milkah and Tirtzah." Menasseh's population count was 52,700 (previous census, 32,200).

Ephraim (Shuthalchi, Bachri, Tachani, Eirani) = 32,500 (previous census, 40,500).

**Benjamin** (Bal'i, Ashbeli, Achirami, Shufami, Chufami, Ardi, Naami) = 45,600 (previous census, 35,400).

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## Commentary

The commentaries explain this large reduction in Shimon's population as due to the fact that the Shimonites were the major culprits in the worship of Pe'or with the daughters of Midian (Zimri, who was killed by Pinchas, was the "prince" and leader of the tribe of Shimon; according to the Talmud, his motive was to legitimize the transgressions of his tribe). Many Shimonites were executed for their crimes (as per Numbers 25:5) and they constituted the greater part, if not all, of the 24,000 who perished in the plague (Midrash Tanchuma; Rashi).

This was not the only instance in which the people were so decimated. We read of plagues and other catastrophes following the sins of the Golden Calf, the "Complainers," the lust for meat, the Spies, the unauthorized push to enter the Land, the rebellion of Korach and its aftermath. Indeed other tribes, too, show a fall in population (though none as drastic as Shimon's), and the people as a whole are also fewer by nearly 2000 despite the natural increase one would expect after a full generation (in contrast, the children of Israel swelled from 70 souls to 600,000 in the 210 years they were in Egypt).

**Benjamin:** The commentaries further note that whole families have been wiped out. There are now five Shimonite clans instead of six, Gad has likewise lost a family and Benjamin has lost five. Rashi cites an account by the Jerusalem Talmud (Sotah 1:10) of a civil war that was fought following the death of Aaron, when the Israelites were attacked by a Canaanite army. Many Jews fled

Dan (the father of the tribe, Dan, had only one son, Chushim, so that the entire tribe consisted of one family -- the Shuchami) = 64,400 (previous census, 62,700).

Asher (Yimnah, Yshvi, Bri'i, Chevri, Malkieli; "and the name of Asher's daughter was Serach") -- 53,400 (up from 41,500).

Naphtali's descendents divided themselves into the Yachtzeli, Guni, Yitzri and Shileimi clans, and their number in this census was 45,400 (previous census, 53,400).

"Among these shall the Land be **apportioned** as an inheritance," said G-d to Moses, "according to the number of names."

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## Commentary

with a mind to return to Egypt, retreating eight "stations" in their journey through the desert, from Hor HaHar to Moserah. The tribe of Levi waged war with them to force them back, and seven Israelite families--and four Levite families--died in battle.

**apportioned:** *If a man die, and have no son, then you shall pass his inheritance on to his daughter (27:8)*

The Kabbalistic masters taught that every soul has a "portion in the land"--a piece of G-d's world that he or she have been charged to sanctify. Thus a person's mission in life can be seen as consisting of two primary objectives: a) the refinement and elevation of his own soul, self and character; b) the refinement and elevation of his "portion" of the material world, by developing the material resources which have been placed under his control or influence as a "home for G-d"--a place that serves and houses the Divine truth. The latter objective is the essence of the mitzvah to "conquer the Land of Canaan" and transform it into a "Holy Land."

(This was the failing of the "generation of the desert": while they achieved an "Exodus from Egypt"--a liberation from the bounds that constrict the soul--they were unwilling to assume the challenge of "conquering the land"--transforming the material world into a home for G-d.)

The nature of the material is that it is resistant and hostile to G-dliness. "Conquest of the land"--it would therefore seem--requires that a person go to battle with the material world, suppress and subjugate its materialistic nature and impose on it a higher purpose and function.

But not everyone is a warrior. The Talmud says of the human race, "Just as their faces are different, so are their characters different." There are bold characters and meek characters, aggressive natures and passive dispositions; there are those who revel in challenge, and those who are all but devoid of the warrior instinct and the zeal for confrontation. Are the latter exempt from

*To the more numerous you shall increase their inheritance, and to the fewer you shall lessen their inheritance...*

**Nevertheless** *the land shall be divided by lot... according to the lot shall their inheritance be divided, whether many or few.*

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## Commentary

the mission to "conquer the land"? And if they are not, how are they to achieve it?

Therein lies the deeper significance of the laws of inheritance as commanded by G-d in response to the petition by the daughters of Tzelafchad.

Before the daughters of Tzelafchad came along, common wisdom ascertained that if a person lacks a "son"--an aggressive and combative nature--he or she may deduce from this that he has no role to play in the "conquest of the land." Such a person may therefore devote all his energies to the refinement of his inner self, and leave the task of sanctifying an unholy world to those with "sons."

The daughters of Tzelafchad knew otherwise. Conquering and settling the land, they insisted, is not an exclusively masculine endeavor. True, this is a task which often calls for aggressiveness and confrontation; but there is also a feminine way to transform the materiality of our lives into a "Holy Land."

G-d agreed. "If a man & has no son," He instructed, "you shall pass his inheritance on to his daughter"--his "portion in the land" can be possessed and developed by the passive, compassionate, non-confrontational side of his soul.

This is the law of life revealed by the daughters of Tzelafchad: Not all conquests are achieved by overpowering one's adversary. At times, receptiveness and empathy are equally, if not more, effective in overcoming the hostility of the "enemy" and transforming its very nature. The absence of a "male heir" in the soul may in fact indicate the presence of a feminine self no less capable of claiming the soul's portion in the world and transforming it into a "home for G-d."

(From the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe)

**Nevertheless:** *To the more numerous you shall increase their inheritance, and to the fewer you shall lessen their inheritance... Nevertheless the land shall be divided by lot... whether many or few (26:54-55)*

The commentaries offer different approaches to explaining the apparent contradiction in these verses. Rashi says that the land was divided into twelve provinces of different size, taking into account the difference in population among the tribes. Nevertheless, the question of which province should go to which tribe was determined by lot; miraculously, the lot matched the

The tribe of Levi, which did not receive a share in the Land, was counted separately; they numbered 23,000 (in the previous census, they numbered 22,300).

The Torah concludes the census by stating:

*Among these there was **not a man** of them whom Moses and Aaron the priest had numbered when they counted the children of Israel in the Sinai Desert. For G-d had said of them: They shall surely die in the wilderness.*

"There was not left a man of them, except for Calev the son of Yefuneh, and Joshua the son of Nun."

## The Daughters of Tzelafchad

Machlah, Noah, Chaglah, Milkah and Tirtzah were the five daughters of Tzelafchad, the son of Chefer, the son of Gil'ad, the son of Menasseh, and they had a petition to present to Moses:

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## Commentary

more populous tribes with the larger provinces and the less populous ones with the smaller provinces.

Nachmanides says that the land was divided into 12 equal portions (not necessarily equal in size, since the quality of land was also taken into consideration), and the matching of provinces to tribes was done by lot. Thus each tribe received an equal share, regardless of population. The instruction that "To the more numerous you shall increase their inheritance, and to the fewer you shall lessen their inheritance" refers to the division of the land within the tribes: each tribal head divided his tribe's portion among the families of the tribe in accordance to the number of members in each family (as determined by the census taken here).

Another opinion is that the lottery determined the location of each tribe's portion but not its size, which was adjusted in accordance with the tribe's population. (Me'am Loez)

**not a man:** The women, however, were not with them in their counsel, as may be inferred from the fact that it is written in an earlier passage of our Parshah, "For G-d had said of them: They shall surely die in the desert. And there was not left a man of them, save Caleb the son of Yefuneh" (ibid. v. 65)....

The men had been unwilling to enter the Land; the women petitioned to receive an inheritance in the Land.

(Midrash Rabbah)

And they stood before Moses, and before Elazar the priest, and before the princes and all the congregation, by the door of the Tent of Meeting, saying:

"Our father died in the desert. He was not in the company of them that gathered themselves together against G-d in the company of Korach; but he died in **his own sin**, and had no sons.

"Why should the name of our father be eliminated from his family, because he has no son? Give us an estate [in the **Land**] among the brothers of our father."

And **Moses** brought their **judgement** before G-d.

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## Commentary

**his own sin:** He died in his own sin (27:3)

Rabbi Akiva says: he was the wood gatherer (cf. Numbers 15:32-36). Rabbi Shimon says: He was from those who stormed the mountain to enter the Land (ibid. 14:40-45). (Talmud; Rashi)

The daughters of Tzelafchad wished to strengthen their argument, "Why should the name of our father be eliminated [from those receiving a portion in the Land]?" by stressing that their father was not guilty of his generation's spurning of the land. According to the opinion that he was the "wood gatherer," he died many months before the Spies' mission (according to the Talmud, the incident of the wood gatherer occurred on the second Shabbat after the Giving of the Torah). And if he was one of the "mountain stormers", their sin was that they so deeply regretted falling prey to the Spies' evil report that they erred in the other direction, and lost their lives in the effort to enter the Land in violation of the Divine decree. (The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

**Land:** And the daughters of Tzelafchad approached... (27:1)

In that generation the women repaired what the men broke down.

You find that Aaron told them: "Break off the golden rings, which are in the ears of your wives" (to make the Golden Calf--Exodus 32: 2), but the women refused and held back their husbands; as is proved by the fact that it says (ibid. v.3), "And all the people broke off the golden rings which were in their ears," the women not participating with them in making the Calf.

It was the same in the case of the spies, who uttered an evil report: "And the men... when they returned, made all the congregation to murmur against him" (Numbers 14:36), and against this congregation the decree [not to enter the Land] was issued, because they had said: "We are not able to go up" (ibid. v. 31).

G-d replies:

"The daughters of Tzelafchad speak rightly; you shall surely give them a possession of inheritance among their father's brethren, and you shall cause the inheritance of their father to pass to them."

G-d then proceeds to include this provision in the Torah's **laws of inheritance**.

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## Commentary

**Moses:** And Moses brought their judgement before G-d (27:5)

Moses prayed to G-d to concede their request and to permit them a portion in the Land. (Maor v'Shemesh)

**judgement:** And they stood before Moses.... saying (27:2)

The daughters of Tzelafchad were wise women, they were exegetes (i.e., well-versed in the methodology of expounding Torah law), they were virtuous.

They were wise, for they spoke at an opportune moment... Moses was sitting and holding forth an exposition on the section of levirate marriages (the law that if a person dies without "seed" his brother should marry his widow to "establish for his brother an heir in Israel"--cf. Deuteronomy 25:5-10). They said unto him: "If we are as a son (i.e., if we are considered "seed"), give us an inheritance as to a son; if not, then our mother should be subject to the law of levirate marriage!" (The law states that levirate marriage can take place only if there is no issue at all, male or female)...

They were virtuous, since they would marry only such men as were worthy of them.... Even the youngest among them was not married before forty years of age. (This is deduced from the fact that Tzelafchad died in the first year after Exodus, and his daughters' petition was in the 40th year; thus the youngest of them could have been less than 40 at the time. Yet this occurred before their marriage, as evidenced from Numbers 36).

(Talmud, Bava Batra 119b)

**laws of inheritance:** And they stood before Moses.... saying (27:2)

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*And you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: If a man die, and have no son, then you shall pass his inheritance on to his **daughter**.*

## Commentary

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**daughter:** However these verses are understood, the implication is that the Torah is insisting that two different--even conflicting--dynamics be involved in the apportionment of the land: a *rational* division, which takes into account empirical data such as population figures and the quality of the land; a *supra-rational* lottery, whose workings are beyond human comprehension and control.

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But then there are the circumstances and experiences that "befall" us in a seemingly random and arbitrary manner. A person will often mistake these for "chance." But these are no less the hand

*And if he have no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers. And if he have no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his father's brothers. And if his father have no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his kinsman that is next to him of his family, and he shall possess it: and it shall be to the children of Israel a statute of judgment, as G-d commanded Moses.*

## The Succession

G-d commands Moses to climb the Avarim Mountain "and see the land which I have given to the children of Israel... And you shall see it; and then you shall be gathered to your people, as Aaron your brother was gathered...."

*And Moses spoke to G-d, saying:*

## Commentary

of Divine Providence than the rational side of life. In fact, they express a more profound involvement by G-d in our lives--an involvement that is too lofty to be captured by any logical formula, so that our earthly eyes can perceive it only as an "arbitrary" casting of lots. These are gifts that are too potent to be tapped with the conventional tools of intellect and instinct; we can only open ourselves to their possibilities.

Finally, we each have those moments in life when our "inheritance" comes to light. Moments which are not driven by our reason, nor by the transcendent forces that impact our lives, but by the very essence of who and what we are--by that deepest self that is one with its Source.

Life is the sum of these three elements. To live is to develop and optimize one's consciously understood faculties. To live is to be receptive to the mysteries of life, to learn to recognize and respond to the opportunities implicit in the most esoteric turns of fate. And to live is to be attuned to the core of truth in the core of one's soul--to one's heritage as a child of G-d.

**Succession:** *And you shall place of your glory upon him (27:20)*

"Of your glory"--but not all your glory. The elders of that generation said: The countenance of Moses was like that of the sun; the countenance of Joshua was like that of the moon. Alas, for such shame! Alas for such reproach!(Talmud, Bava Batra 75a)

**Moses spoke to G-d:** *Who shall take them out and who shall bring them in (27:17)*

This is like the parable of a king who saw an orphan maiden and wished to marry her. He sent her messages proposing to her, but she said: "I am not worthy to marry a king." He proposed to her

"O G-d , G-d of the spirits of all flesh!

"Set a man over the congregation, who shall go out before them and who shall go in before them, who shall **lead** them out and who shall bring them in; so that the congregation of G-d be not as sheep that have no shepherd."

And G-d said to Moses: "Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is spirit, and lay your hand upon him. Set him before Elazar the priest, and before all the congregation, and charge him before their eyes."

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## Commentary

seven times, but each time she refused. After many entreaties, he married her. After a time, the king became angry at her and wished to divorce her. Said she to him: "I did not ask to marry you--it was you who pleaded with me. Now you have decreed to divorce me and marry another. Just don't do to her what you did to me."

In the same way, G-d appeared to Moses in the burning bush and said to him: "Come now, I will send you to Pharaoh." For seven days G-d entreated Moses (as it says "Also from yesterday, also from three days ago, also from the time that You're speaking with Your servant"--Exodus 4:10) and Moses declined, saying, "I am not a man of words." In the end, He convinced him, and Moses accepted the mission of leading the people out of Egypt. Then, after all the miracles were done through Moses, G-d said to him: "You shall not bring this congregation into the Land." Said Moses: "Master of the Universe! I did not ask to go... Now that You decreed that not I should lead them into the Land, but another, do not do to him what you did to me. '[Set a man over the congregation] who shall take them out and who shall bring them in...'" (Yalkut Shimoni)

**lead:** *Who shall go out before them and who shall go in before them, who shall lead them out and who shall bring them in (27:17)*

Rabbi Israel Salanter was once asked to explain the Talmudic prediction (Sanhedrin 97a) that in the days before the coming of Moshiach, "The face (i.e., the leadership) of the generation will have the face of a dog."

Said Rabbi Israel: "Have you ever seen a man and a dog walking? The dog always runs ahead. So to the casual observer it seems that the dog is the leader. But every now and then the dog turns around to see where his master wants to go, and changes direction accordingly."

"Today, our world abounds with such 'leaders.' But a true leader is not one who merely 'goes and comes before the people,' while looking over his shoulder to see if they are still following him. He is also the one who 'takes them out and brings them in'--who *leads* them where he knows they must go."

"And you shall place of your glory upon him, in order that all the **congregation** of the children of Israel shall obey [him]...."

And Moses did as G-d commanded him...

## The Seasonal Offerings

The Parshah of Pinchas concludes with a detailed list of the "communal offerings" to be brought by the people as a whole in the Sanctuary.

There are the daily offerings, "Two yearling lambs without blemish, day by day... The one lamb shall you offer in the morning, and the other lamb shall you offer at evening." These are accompanied by "a tenth part of an *efah* of fine flour for a meal offering, mingled with the fourth part of a *hin* of beaten oil... and its drink offering shall be the fourth part of a *hin* [of wine]."

Then there are the "additional offerings" brought on **special occasions**, each in its appointed season:

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## Commentary

**congregation:** *G-d of the spirits of all flesh! Set a man over the people (27:16)*

So said Moses to G-d: "Master of the universe! You know the soul of each and every individual, You know that no two are alike. Appoint for them a leader who can relate to each and every one of them in accordance with his individual spirit." (Rashi)

**special occasions:** *You shall observe to offer it to Me in its appointed time& two each day, a regular offering& (28:2-3)*

The "appointed time" of the regular offerings is every day.

(Rashi)

The communal offerings include *temiddin*--"regular" or "perpetual" offerings brought each day in the same format--and *mussafin*--"additional" offerings brought on special occasions (Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh, the festivals) which differ in accordance with the nature of the day.

In our own lives there also exists this division: there are the "routine" things, such as the fifteen breaths we take each minute and the job we troop to each workday; and there are the "special" things we do once in a while or once in a lifetime. Both are crucial to a fulfilling and satisfying life. The offerings--and their present-day substitute, prayer--include both *temiddin* and *mussafin*, to teach us that our relationship with G-d should likewise embrace the



On Shabbat, two yearling lambs are to be offered (in addition to the two brought every day).

On Rosh Chodesh ("Head of the Month") there are added two bullocks, one ram and seven sheep, plus a he-goat as a sin-offering. The same "additional offerings" are to be brought on each of the seven days of Passover and on the festival of Shavuot.

On Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Shemini Atzeret, the additional offerings consisted of the same, except that only one bullock was brought instead of two (on Yom Kippur, there were other offerings connected with the day's service, as related in the Parshah of Acharei-Mot).

On the seven days of Sukkot, the number of communal offerings increase greatly. Each day, there are 14 sheep instead of seven. Thirteen bullocks are brought on the first day, twelve on the second, eleven on the third, and so on in descending order until the seventh day, when seven bullocks are offered, bringing the total of bullocks over the seven days of the festival to seventy. (The next day, however, being the festival of Shemini Atzeret, only **one** bullock is offered).

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## Commentary

surety of the routine on the one hand, and the excitement of the occasional on the other.

But when speaking of the two daily offerings, the Torah uses the term *mo'ed*, "appointed time"--a phrase generally reserved for the festivals and other occasionally occurring observances. This means that the Torah also urges us to transcend these categorizations and experience a sense of specialty and occasion also in the "regular" rhythms of life. As Rashi comments on the verse, "The 'appointed time' of the regular offerings is every day."

(From the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe)

**one:** *The eighth day shall be a time of retreat for you... and you shall offer a fire-offering to G-d, a sweet savor: one bullock (29:35)*

Said Rabbi Elazar: To what do the seventy bullocks that were offered during the seven days of Sukkot correspond? To the seventy nations. To what does the single bullock of the Eighth Day correspond? To the unique nation (Israel). This may be compared to a mortal king who said to his servants, "Prepare for me a great banquet"; but on the last day he said to his beloved friend, "Prepare for me a simple meal that I may derive pleasure from you." (Talmud, Sukkah 55b)

With each of the animals is brought the prescribed **meal, wine and oil** supplements: three tenths of an *efah* of fine flour, and half a *hin* each of wine and oil, per bullock; two tenths of flour and a third of a *hin* of each of the liquids for each ram; and one tenth and one quarter respectively for each lamb.

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## Commentary

**meal, wine and oil:** *My offering, My bread (28:2)*

The people of Israel provide nourishment for their Father in Heaven (Zohar)

The Talmud (Berachot 10a) points to the relationship between the soul and the body as a model for the nature of G-d's relationship with the world. The soul cannot be perceived by the senses, yet its presence and effect is keenly felt in every part of the body; so too, G-d, though He transcends our reality and is utterly beyond its perception, vitalizes the entirety of creation and is fully present in its every part.

This explains the amazing statement by the Zohar that "The people of Israel provide nourishment for their Father in Heaven." Food is the glue that keeps soul and body together, sustaining the embodiment of the spirit within its material shell. By the same token, our service of G-d is what sustains G-d's involvement with His creation, "feeding" His desire to continue to infuse it with existence and life.

Thus G-d refers to the *korban* the animal and meal offerings brought in the Holy Temples "My bread." The *korbanot* (and their present-day substitute, prayer) are the highest expression of our striving to serve G-d and come close to Him; as such, they are the "food" which sustains the life of the universe, the fuel that keeps the Divine soul "alive" within the body of creation.

(Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi)

# The Zealot

*Based on the teaching's of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson.*

*And G-d spoke to Moses, saying: "Pinchas, the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the Kohen, turned away My wrath from the children of Israel with his zealotry for My sake... Therefore... I shall grant him My covenant of peace..."*

Numbers 25:11-12

Pinchas' deed evokes many associations -- courage, decisiveness and religious passion are several that come to mind -- but peace hardly seems one of them. Pinchas, after all, killed two people. True, what he did was condoned by Torah law, and his doing so saved many lives; still, one does not usually think of homicide as a peaceful act.

As the Torah tells it (see Numbers, 25; Rashi, *ibid*; Talmud, Sanhedrin 81b-82b and 106a), the wicked prophet Balaam, having failed to undermine the people of Israel's special relationship with G-d by harping on their past sins, had an idea. "Their G-d abhors promiscuity," he said to Balak, the Moabite king who had hired him to place a curse on Israel. Corrupt them with the daughters of your realm, and you will provoke His wrath upon them.

This time Balaam succeeded. Many Jews, particularly from the tribe of Shimon, were enticed by the Midianite harlots who descended upon the Israelite camp in the Shittim valley, and were even induced to serve Baal Peor, the pagan god of their consorts. When tribunals were set up by Moses to try and punish the idolaters, Zimri, the leader of Shimon, sought to legitimize his tribe's sins by publicly taking a Midianite woman into his tent, before the eyes of Moses and the eyes of the entire community of Israel.

Moses and the nation's elders were at a loss as of what to do. Torah law does not provide for any conventional, court-induced punishment for such an offender. There is a law that gives license for "zealots to smite him," but this provision eluded Moses and the entire Jewish leadership. Only Pinchas remembered it, and had the fortitude to carry it through. He killed Zimri and the Midianite woman, stopping a plague that had begun to rage as the result of G-d's wrath against His people.

## The Grandfather Issue

The Talmud, referring to G-d's opening words to Moses quoted above, asks: The Torah has already told us who Pinchas is, back in the sixth chapter of Exodus and again, but a few short verses before, in Numbers 25:7. Why does the Torah again refer to him as "Pinchas, the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron?"

Rashi, quoting the Talmud and Midrash, explains:

Because the tribes of Israel were mocking him, saying Have you seen this son of the fattener, whose mother's father fattened calves for idolatrous sacrifices, and now he goes and kills a prince in Israel?! Therefore, G-d traced his lineage to Aaron. (Pinchas' maternal grandfather was Jethro, who prior to his conversion to Judaism, was a pagan priest).

This explanation, however, seems to raise more questions than it answers:

(a) What set "the tribes of Israel" against Pinchas? The animosity of one tribe, the tribe of Shimon, would be understandable: he killed their leader and put an end to their pagan orgy. But why was he condemned by the entire community of Israel, most of whom were outraged by Zimri's act and were doubtless grateful for Pinchas' stopping the plague?

(b) Of what possible relevance is Jethro's past? If Pinchas acted wrongly, then he is guilty of much worse than having a grandfather who fattened calves for slaughter. "Murderer" would be a more apt epithet than "fattener's grandson." And if it was acknowledged that killing Zimri was the right thing to do, why was the young hero and savior of his people being mocked?

(c) If, for whatever reason, Pinchas is to be faulted because of Jethro's idolatrous past, why dwell on the fact that he "fattened calves for slaughter"? What about the fact that he was a pagan priest who (as the Midrash tells us) had served every idol in the world?

(d) Whatever the complaint against Pinchas was, how is it refuted by the fact that he was Aaron's grandson?

## Who Is A Zealot?

The nature of Zimri's crime made his killing an extremely sensitive moral issue. On the one hand, the Torah deems what he did as deserving of death. On the other hand, it does not entrust the carrying out of the sentence to the normal judiciary process, ruling instead that "zealots should smite him." Who, then, qualifies as a zealot?

When a sentence is carried out after the due process of a trial and conviction, there is less of a need to dwell on the motives of the judges and executioner: they're going by the book, and we can check their behavior against the book. But the motives of the zealot who takes unilateral action are extremely important, for his very qualifications as a zealot hinge upon the question of what, exactly, prompted him to do what he did. Is he truly motivated to "still G-d's wrath", or has he found a holy outlet for his individual aggression? Is his act truly an act of peace, driven by the desire to reconcile an errant people with their G-d, or is it an act of violence, made kosher by the assumption of the label "zealot"?

The true zealot is an utterly selfless individual -- one who is concerned only about the relationship between G-d and His people, with no thought for his own feelings on the matter. The moment his personal prejudices and inclinations are involved, he ceases to be a zealot.

(This may be why the law that "zealots smite him" falls under the unique legal category of *halachah v'ein morin kein*, "'a law that is not instructed": if a would-be zealot comes to the court and inquires if he is permitted to kill the transgressor, he is not given license to do so (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Forbidden Relations, 12:5). Indeed, the very fact that he has come to ask disqualifies him -- someone who needs to ensure, in advance, that he is backed by the court, is no zealot. The true zealot has no thought for himself: not of his feelings on the matter, not of his personal safety, not even of the moral and spiritual implications of his act on his own self -- he doesn't even care if what he is doing is legal or not. He is simply determined to put an end to a situation that incurs the Divine wrath against Israel.)

### Aaron's Grandson

According to this, the questions posed above answer each other.

The tribes of Israel knew that the case of Zimri warranted the law that "Zealots smite him." But they were skeptical of Pinchas' motivations. Why is it, they asked, that no one -- not Moses, not the elders, nor anyone in the entire leadership of Israel -- was moved to assume the role of zealot, save for Pinchas, "the youngest of the band"? Was Pinchas the most caring and selfless one of them all? Far more likely, said they, that what we have here is an angry young man who thinks he found a Torah-sanctioned outlet for his aggression.

A bit of digging around in the skeletons of Pinchas' family closet only reinforced their initial doubts. Of

course, they said, look at his grandfather! Few professions are as inhumane as the fattening of calves for slaughter. The fact of Jethro's idolatry is not what is relevant here, but his nature and personality. Pinchas, the "tribes of Israel" reasoned, must have inherited his grandfather's natural cruelty, and proceeded to clothe it in the holy vestments of zealotry.

So G-d explicitly attached Pinchas' name to Aaron, the gentlest, most peace-loving man that Israel knew. Aaron, the "lover of peace and pursuer of peace, one who loves humanity and brings them close to Torah." In character and temperament, G-d was attesting, Pinchas takes after his other grandfather, Aaron. Not only is he not inclined to violence -- it is the very antithesis of his natural temperament. Pinchas is a man of peace, who did what he did with the sole aim of "turning away My wrath from the children of Israel."

### Two Hypocrites

This also explains the significance of another statement by Rashi. After emphasizing that Pinchas was Aaron's grandson, the Torah writes: "And the name of the smitten Israelite, who was smitten with the Midianite, was Zimri the son of Salu, a tribal prince of the Shimonites." On which Rashi comments, "On the same occasion that the righteous ones lineage was cited in praise, the wicked ones lineage was cited in detriment." But what detriment is there in Zimri's being a Shimonite prince?

Those who looked with a negative eye on Pinchas' motives, saw his cruelty even more strongly underscored when contrasted with the motives of the man he killed. Pinchas slew a man, while that man was engaged in an act of love; Pinchas was giving vent to his own violent passions, while Zimri acted out of a selfless concern for his constituents, putting his own life on the line (for surely he knew that some zealot might take it upon himself to kill him) to save his tribe through his bold attempt to legitimize their sins. If Pinchas did the right thing -- these critics were saying -- he did it for all the wrong reasons, while Zimri might have done a wrong thing, but was motivated by an altruistic love for his people.

G-d, who knows the heart of every man, spoke to dispel this distorted picture. Pinchas, He attested, inherited the peace-loving nature of his grandfather, while Zimri was every inch a descendent of *Shimon*, whom Jacob rebuked for his heated and violent nature. ("Cursed be their anger, it was fierce," said Jacob of Shimon and Levi, rebuking them for the massacre of Shechem and

their plot against Joseph, "and their wrath, for it was cruel" -- Genesis 49:5.)

Indeed, the Talmud describes a hypocrite as one who "does the deeds of Zimri, and asks to be rewarded like Pinchas." Zimri's kindness was the ultimate hypocrisy: instead of fulfilling his role as the leader of his people by prevailing upon them to cease the behavior that was destroying them, he pursued the fulfillment of his own passions, without regard to the terrible consequences to their spiritual and physical well-being -- all the while disguising his act as selfless and self-sacrificial. In contrast, Pinchas deed was "hypocritical" in the positive sense: ostensibly violent and cruel, but in truth a selfless act of peace.

## Counting Souls

*Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson*

In Hebrew, it's called *Bamidbar* ("In the Desert") and also *Sefer HaPekudim* ("The Book of the Countings"); in the English-speaking world, this is the biblical section known as "Numbers". And yes, there are many, many numbers in the fourth of the Torah's five books.

In its opening chapters we learn that one year after the Exodus, there were 603,550 adult Israelite males between the ages of 20 and 60, of whom 22,273 were firstborn; a separate census counted 22,300 Levites age one month and older (7,500 Gershonites, 8,600 Kehattites, and 6,200 in the Merrari clan). We are also given the figure for each of the twelve tribes, from the Judah's 74,600 to Menasseh's 32,200. Then the Torah tallies the number in each of the four "camps" into which the twelve tribes were divided: Judah's camp, which also included the tribes of Issachar and Zebulun, totaled 186,400; the three tribes in Reuben's camp totaled 151,450; Ephraim's camp included 108,100, and 157,600 pitched their tents in the Camp of Dan.

Twenty six chapters and 39 years later we're still in the Book of Numbers and in the midst of another census. Again, we get the total figure (now 601,730) and the numbers for each tribe. We notice that Simeon has been tragically decimated (22,200, down from 59,300) while Menasseh's ranks have swelled to 52,700 (a gain of 20,500). But most of all we notice how G-d's passion for counting His people has not waned.

For, as G-d says to Moses, we're not just counting people. We're "raising their heads."

When a census is taken, the count will include scholars and boors, professionals and vagabonds, philanthropists and misers, saints and criminals. Yet each counts for no more and no less than "1" in the total number. The count reflects only the one quality they all share equally: the fact that each is an individual human being.

So is a headcount an expression of the lowest common denominator in a collection of individuals? The answer depends on how one views the essence of humanity. If man is basically neutral or worse--if we all begin with zero and make of ourselves what we are -- than what unites us as individuals is indeed the least of our qualities. G-d, however, has a different perspective on the "huddled masses" of man.

As G-d sees it, the soul of man is a spark of His own fire -- a spark with the potential to reflect the infinite goodness and perfection of its source. Human life is the endeavor to realize what is implicit in this spark. Indeed, a person may lead a full, accomplished and righteous life, and barely scratch the surface of the infinitude of his or her soul. Another person may blunder for a lifetime in darkness and iniquity, and then, in a moment of self-discovery, fan their Divine spark into roaring flame.

So when G-d instructs that we be counted, it is an expression of our *highest* common denominator. On the Divine census sheet, our differences are transcended to reveal the simple fact of our being -- a fact which expresses what is best in us, and from which stems all that is good in us.

G-d counts us not to know our number (which He obviously knows), or even to get in touch with the quintessence of our souls (which He obviously is). He counts us to accentuate our soul of souls, to give expression to its essence and to make it more accessible to our material-bound lives.

Therein lies the deeper significance of the idiom "raise the heads" in G-d's instruction to Moses to count the people of Israel. When G-d counts us, He is stimulating the highest and loftiest part of our being, the spark of Divinity which lies at the core of our soul.

*Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe; adapted by Yanki Tauber*