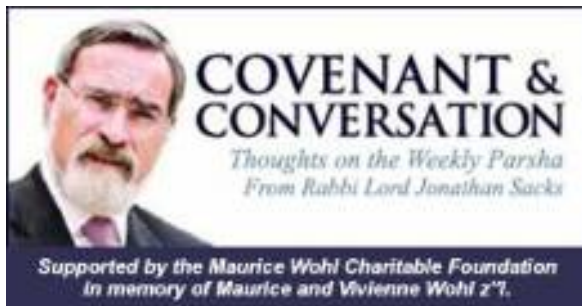


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On Parents and Teachers

Just beneath the surface of today's this week's parshah is an exceptionally poignant story. It occurs in the context of Moses' prayer that God appoint a successor as leader of the Jewish people.

One hint is given in the words of God to Moses: "After you have seen you also will be gathered to your people, as your brother Aaron was." Rashi is intrigued by the apparently superfluous word "also", and makes the comment that "Moses desired to die as Aaron had died."

In what sense was Moses envious of his brother? Was it that he, like Aaron, wished to die painlessly? Surely not. Moses was not afraid of pain. Was it that he envied his brother's popularity? Of Aaron, it was said that when he died, he was mourned by "all the children of Israel", something the Torah does not say in the

case of Moses. This too cannot be the answer. Moses knew that leadership does not mean popularity. He did not seek it. He could not have done what he had to do and achieve it.

The Ktav Sofer gives what is surely the correct interpretation: Aaron had the privilege of knowing that his children would follow in his footsteps. Elazar, his son, was appointed as high priest in his lifetime. Indeed to this day cohanim are direct descendants of Aaron. Accordingly to Ktav Sofer, Moses longed to see one of his sons, Gershom or Eliezer, take his place as leader of the people. It was not to be.

Rashi arrives at the same conclusion by noting a second clue. The passage in which Moses asks God to appoint a successor follows directly after the story of the daughters of Zelophehad, who asked that they be permitted to inherit the share in the land of Israel that would have gone to their father, had he not died. Rashi links the two episodes: "When Moses heard God tell him to give the inheritance of Zelophehad to his daughters, he said to himself, 'The time has come that I should make a request of my own -- that my sons should inherit my position.' God replied to him, 'This is not what I have decided. Joshua deserves to receive reward for serving you and never leaving your tent.' This is what Solomon meant when he said, 'He keeps the vineyard shall eat its fruit and he that waits on his master shall be honoured.' Moses' prayer was not granted.

Thus, with their ears attuned to every nuance, the sages and Rashi reconstructed a narrative that lies just beneath the surface of the biblical text. What happened to Moses children? Was he, the great leader, inwardly disappointed that they did not inherit his role? What deeper message

does the text communicate to us? Is there something of continuing relevance in Moses' disappointment? Did God in any way provide him with consolation?

Moses and Aaron epitomise the two great roles in Jewish continuity - horim and morim -- parents and teachers. A parent hands on the Jewish heritage to his or her children; a teacher does likewise to his or her disciples. Aaron was the archetypal parent; Moses the great example of a teacher (to this day we call him Moshe Rabbenu, 'Moses our teacher'). Aaron was succeeded by his son; Moses by his disciple Joshua.

The sages at various points emphasised that Torah leadership does not pass automatically across the generations. The Talmud (Nedarim 81a) states:

Be careful not to neglect the children of the poor, for from them Torah goes forth, as it is written, "the water shall flow out of his buckets", meaning "from the poor among them" goes forth Torah. And why is it not usual for scholars to give birth to children who are scholars? Rabbi Joseph said, that it might not be said that Torah is their legacy. Rabbi Shisha son of Rabbi Idi said, that they should not be arrogant towards the community. Mar Zutra said, because they act high-handedly towards the community.

Were Torah leadership to be dynastic, a matter of inheritance, Judaism would quickly become a society of privilege and hierarchy. To this, the sages were utterly opposed. Everyone has a share in Torah. It is the shared patrimony of every Jew. Nowhere is this more clearly stated

than in the great words of Maimonides:

With three crowns was Israel crowned -- with the crown of Torah, the crown of priesthood, and the crown of sovereignty. The crown of priesthood was bestowed on Aaron ... The crown of sovereignty was given to David ... The crown of Torah, however, is for all Israel, as it is said, "Moses commanded us the Torah, as an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob." Whoever desires it can win it. Do not suppose that the other two crowns are greater than the crown of Torah, for it is said, "By me kings reign and princes decree justice. By me, princes rule." Hence we learn the crown of Torah is greater than the other two crowns.

This is one of the great egalitarian statements in Judaism. The crown of Torah is available to whoever seeks it. There have been societies which sought to create equality by evenly distributing power or wealth. None succeeded fully. The Jewish approach was different. A society of equal dignity is one in which knowledge -- the most important kind of knowledge, namely Torah, knowledge of how to live -- is available equally to all. From earliest times to today, the Jewish people has been a series of communities built around schools, sustained by communal funds so that none should be excluded.

The sages drew a strong connection between home and school, parent and teacher. Thus, for example, Maimonides rules:

A duty rests on every scholar in Israel to teach all disciples who seek instruction from him, even if they are not his children, as it is said,

"And you shall teach them diligently to your children". According to traditional authority, the term "your children" includes disciples, for disciples are called children, as it is said, "And the sons of the prophets came forth" (II Kings 2:3).

In the same vein he writes elsewhere:

Just as a person is commanded to honor and revere his father, so he is under an obligation to honor and revere his teacher, even to a greater extent than his father, for his father gave him life in this world, while his teacher who instructs him in wisdom secures for him life in the world to come.

The connection runs in the opposite direction also. Consistently throughout the Mosaic books, the role of a parent is defined in terms of teaching and instruction. "You shall teach these things diligently to your children." "It shall come to pass that when your child asks you ... thus shall you say to him." Education is a conversation across the generations, between parent and child. In the one verse in which the Bible explains why Abraham was chosen as the father was of a new faith it says, "For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just". Abraham was chosen to be both a parent and an educator.

Moses was therefore denied the chance to see his children inherit his role, so that his personal disappointment would become a source of hope to future generations. Torah leadership is not the prerogative of an elite. It does not pass through dynastic succession. It is not confined to those

descended from great scholars. It is open to each of us, if we will it and give it our best efforts of energy and time. But at the same time, Moses was given a great consolation. Just as, to this day, cohanim are the sons of Aaron, so are all who study Torah the disciples of Moses. To some are given the privilege of being a parent; to others, that of being a teacher. Both are ways in which something of us lives on into the future. Parent-as-teacher, teacher-as-parent: these are Judaism's greatest roles, one immortalised in Aaron, the other made eternal in Moses.



The Connection between Kozbi, Jezebel, and the Righteous Wife of Rabbi Akiva

This week's Torah portion recounts the tragic events in the end of the last week's portion, including the terrible sin of Baal Peor that culminated in the despicable act of immorality between Zimri, the Prince of the Tribe of Shimon and Kozbi, the Midianite Princess.

On the surface, Kozbi appears to be nothing more than an immoral person who hated the Jewish people. However, as is normally the case with regard to the reprehensible characters in the Torah, on deeper analysis, it seems that even Kozbi had some redeeming qualities and

desires. The key to understanding this is found in the teachings of the great Kabbalist, the Rama MiPano in his seminal work on *gilgulim* (reincarnations), *Gilgulei Neshamos*.

The Rama MiPano writes that Kozbi returned in a future incarnation as the evil Queen Jezebel, the wife of King Achav.¹ Even more startling, is that she returned in yet another incarnation as the wife of the Roman General, Turnus Rufus who later converted and married Rabbi Akiva². What can be the connection between Kozbi, Jezebel, and the righteous wife of Rabbi Akiva?

Jezebel is surely one of the most nefarious characters in the whole of Tanach. She led her husband, King Achav, astray in idol worship, persecuted the Prophets, in particular the Prophet, Eliyahu, and encouraged her husband to have an innocent man, Naboth HaCaremeli, killed. And yet, the Sages find words of praise for even this contemptible woman. The Midrash³ tells us:

“Her house adjoined the marketplace. Whenever a bride and groom passed by, she would go out of her house and would clap her hands, sing in their honor, and walk them steps...Therefore [although Eliyahu of blessed memory prophesied], ‘The dogs shall eat Jezebel’⁴, the dogs had no power over the limbs that had performed acts of kindness. Thus, it is written, ‘They went to bury her, but they found no more than the skull, the feet, and the palm of her hands’⁵”.

The question arises as to why did she excel in the kindness of being giving joy to the bride and groom in particular⁶? In order to answer this, it is first necessary to point out, as we have mentioned, that even the more negative

characters in the Tanach are not simplistic, ‘bad guys’, rather they often have deep intentions that drive their misjudged action. It seems that Jezebel had a deep desire to join the Jewish people and to marry a Jewish man. This can provide us with a certain level of understanding as to why some of the only good deeds that Jezebel committed were related to giving joy to a bride and groom at their wedding. This may be because of her soul’s deep-seated desire to marry a Jewish man and cleave to the Jewish people.

Accordingly, she related to the joy of a genuine Jewish marriage and celebrated at wedding. Unfortunately, she went about it in the wrong way and because of that, she was severely punished and had to return in another reincarnation.

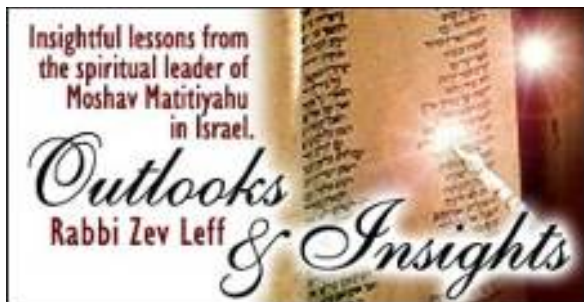
The same can be said for Kozbi – it can be suggested that she had a deep drive to cleave to the Jewish people, which directed her to yearning to cleave to Zimri. Obviously, she was misguided in the way that she went about it, doing it in a forbidden way, and due to her sin and the damage that she caused, she had to come back in another *gilgul*, incarnation.

The final rectification of Kozbi and Jezebel came about in another non-Jewish woman, the wife of Turnus Rufus, who had the same deep-seated craving to cling to the Jewish people. However, this time she went about it in the correct way, converting in the proper way, with intent to keep the Torah, and to cling to a Jewish man in a permitted way, through marriage. In this way, she fulfilled the desires of her earlier incarnations, but did so in the correct manner.

Needless to say, incarnations are something beyond most of us and we have no way of

knowing our status in this regard. However, the examples of Kozbi, Jezebel and the wife of Rabbi Akiva teach that the area in which a person feels a strong drive is likely that area where he can fulfil his life purpose. And they also serve as a warning to make sure that we fulfil that drive in the right way, in consonance with the Torah. May we all merit to fulfil our life's purpose.

1. Interestingly, he adds that as is well-known, Eliyahu HaNavi is a reincarnation of Pinchas. Kozbi was killed by Pinchas, and hundreds of years later, her gilgul, Izevel, made great efforts to take revenge by kill Pinchas' own gilgul, Eliyahu.
2. Nedarim, 50a-50b.
3. Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer, 17.
4. Melachim Aleph, 21:23.
5. Melachim Beis, 9:35.
6. The Midrash also says that she lamented dead people, but this will not be addressed in this essay.



The Function of a Leader

When Moses entreated God to appoint a leader to succeed him, God answered, "Before you command Me concerning My children, command My children concerning Me." Moses proceeded to command the Jewish people concerning the laws of the daily and holiday sacrifices.

In order to understand this Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni – Bamidbar 228), we must first understand the function of a Torah leader. When the Jewish people feared that Moses would not return from Mount Sinai, they beseeched Aaron

to make them a leader who would walk before them. They viewed a leader as one who goes "before," accomplishing what his followers cannot. Thus, when Moses delayed, they felt helpless and in need of a new intermediary.

But when Moses requested that God choose a leader to replace him, he described the leader as one "who will go out before them and who will bring them out and bring them in." The leader was not to walk "before" the people; rather, he was to remain in constant contact with them. He could help bring them in and out by serving as a model to be emulated and as a guide and teacher, but the actual going in and out they would have to do for themselves.

The Talmud (Bava Basra 116a) instructs us that when a family member is sick one should go to a sage and ask for mercy. Meiri explains that from the sage one learns the ways of prayer so that he himself can ask for mercy for his sick relative. The ideal is not that the sage pray in one's place but that one learn from the sage how to pray.

Because Joshua was Moses' most devoted follower, he was chosen to succeed him. Joshua made himself completely subservient to Moses, never departing from his tent. The Talmud tells us: "The face of Moses was like the sun; that of Joshua like the moon. Woe for such a shame and such a disgrace." Joshua faithfully reflected the light of Moses, as the moon reflects the sun, and thereby disgraced all who did not. Joshua showed that he understood that a Jewish leader does not act instead of the people, but rather provides a model to follow. Because he understood this more clearly than any of his contemporaries, he was chosen to succeed Moses.

COMMON CAUSE

The Jewish leader has another crucial function: uniting the people in a common cause. Korach contended that if the entire congregation is holy, then there is no need for a leader to rule over them. He presented his challenge with the homily of a *tallit* that is wholly *techelet* (blue), which, he argued, should not require *tzitzit*. He contended that if a person is totally developed ethically, to the point where his clothing, his character and honor are represented by the *techelet* of God's throne, then the *tzitzit*, the reminders of the mitzvot, are superfluous. Similarly a leader, whose purpose is to coax and direct the people toward the proper goals, would also be unnecessary to one who is fully developed ethically.

Korach failed to appreciate the communal nature of the Jewish people, whose perfection is only reached through a united effort, one in which each Jew fulfills his unique role. The leader serves the function of an orchestra conductor, guiding each player so that the entire orchestra plays together. Even one whose character is perfect still needs a leader to show him how he can function and fulfill his part in harmony with the community.

Thus *tzitzit* are a reminder of all 613 mitzvot that the community as a whole is capable of performing, not the limited number of mitzvot any individual can perform.

COLLECTIVE STRIVING

God told Moses, "Before I appoint a leader to succeed you, first you must command the people concerning the sacrifices." An appreciation of the necessity of communal striving necessarily preceded the appointment of a leader. Just as the offerings of individuals only

have meaning in the context of the person's striving to draw closer to God, so too, the communal sacrifices require the collective striving of the Jewish people for unity and harmony in service of God.

The Kohen is necessary for achieving this unity, but he cannot substitute for the striving of the people themselves. For this reason, representatives of the Levites and the tribes also had to be present at the bringing of each of the communal sacrifices.

The greatness of our leaders is commensurate with the caliber of their followers. May we be on a level to appreciate authority and to emulate our leaders in order that they be as the leaders of old, culminating with our ultimate leader, Moshiach.



Cultivating New Leaders

Greetings from the holy city of Jerusalem!

This week's parsha contains the explosive story of Pinchas (Moses's great-nephew), who sees an act of immorality being committed between Zimri, the prince of the tribe of Shimon, and Kozbi, a Midianite princess. Pinchas takes swift action at eliminating these two people, which subsequently stops the plague God has sent as punishment, saving countless Jewish lives.

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 82a) fleshes out the

picture of what occurred before Zimri united with Kuzbi in full public view. Zimri challenged Moses: "Son of Amram! Is this Midianite woman prohibited or permitted to me? If you say she is prohibited, who permitted you to marry your Midianite wife, Tzipporah?"

(Moses married Tzipporah prior to the giving of the Torah, at which time there was no prohibition against marrying Midianite women, whereas Zimri's act was performed *after* the giving of the Torah, when the prohibition was in full effect. Furthermore, Moses had converted Tzipporah to pre-Torah "Judaism," whereas Zimri had no such intentions. However, these issues were of no concern to Zimri; sometimes, people just aren't interested in answers.)

According to the Talmud, at the moment that Zimri presented his challenge, Moses forgot the law he had received from God at Sinai: namely, that a zealot must take action to eliminate the Jewish perpetrator of such an immoral act. Moses's momentary forgetfulness caused an outbreak of weeping among the entire nation (Numbers 25:6).

This story presents several difficulties. First of all, why did Moses's forgetting a law elicit so many tears? There are far greater tragedies to cry over! Furthermore, the situation was not irreversible; it would simply take a moment for Moses to ask God what the law was!

Another puzzling issue regards the Talmud's comment (Sanhedrin 82a) that it was Pinchas who reminded Moses of the forgotten law - and that, even once Moses had been reminded, it was Pinchas, not Moses, who carried out Zimri's punishment. This seems strange. Once Moses's memory had been refreshed, he himself should have carried out the command!

This is so for two reasons. First, it is always better to perform a mitzvah oneself than to appoint someone else to do it (Kiddushin 41a). Second, Pinchas came from less-than-ideal lineage, and his action could have been criticized: How could a "descendant of idolaters" have the audacity to eliminate a prince of Israel? Whereas if Moses had been the one to eliminate Zimri, no one would have dared to comment.

PRAYING FOR THE SICK

A useful insight can be gleaned from the Talmud (Bava Batra 116a), which states that anyone with an ill family member should go to a tzaddik so that the tzaddik can pray on the ill person's behalf. This is a troubling comment. Why do we need holy people to pray for us? Can't we pray on our own? The Me'iri (in Beit HaBechira) explains that we are instructed to go to a righteous person in order to observe how the righteous person prays. Watching the righteous person will then teach us how to pray on our own. From here, Rabbi Zev Leff points out that the role of a leader is to teach people how to function on their own. A leader is not intended to act *instead* of the people; rather, a master teacher should produce other leaders, not just followers.

This idea will enable us to resolve the two difficulties we raised before. The people did not cry because Moses forgot the law; rather, they cried because Moses's forgetfulness caused them to recognize their own lack of initiative. The whole nation was aware of Moses's imminent death, and they became terrified about their fate. Who would be the next one to lead the people? Would they be helpless once Moses was gone? For a few moments, everyone stood

around staring at each other, not knowing what to do. This scenario was certainly something to cry about, because Moses would have failed as a leader had he not produced people who could lead in his absence.

This idea also helps us understand why Pinchas had to be the one to take action, not Moses. Even after Moses was reminded of the law, he intentionally restrained himself from taking action. He did this in order to see if he had been successful as a leader - i.e. if he had succeeded in producing others who knew how to lead.

May we all be blessed to understand that a Jewish leader does not act instead of the people, but rather provides a model to follow. With this in mind, let us all learn from the greats around us and instill in our children the confidence and skill to be the leaders of the next generation.

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