

Toronto Torah

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

PARSHAT PINCHAS

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This special issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated in memory of Rabbi Yitzchak Witty of blessed memory, HaRav Yitzchak Gamliel ben HaRav Noach HaLevi z"l, by his wife, Rebbetzin Shulamit Witty, and his son and daughter-in-law, Rabbi Avraham Aryaih and Laya Witty.

A Fusion of Past and Present Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner • Rosh Beit Midrash

Ours is a religion of the new; even as we commemorate historical events, our mindset is in the here and now. As Rashi writes, "Every day, [the mitzvot] shall be new in your eyes, as though instructed that day." (Commentary to Devarim 26:16) Similarly, the Talmud avers that authentic Torah study leads to new ideas. (Chagigah 3a) We may offer a voluntary prayer any time we choose, but only if we include a new element. (Berachot 21a)

This religion of the new makes spiritual sense; the prophet Yeshayah (29:13) criticized Jews whose reverence for G-d is rote, and Rabbi Eliezer declared that rote prayer is not prayer at all. (Mishnah Berachot 4:4) Our relationship with G-d must be current, grounded in our ever-changing identity and circumstances.

At first glance, the *korban tamid* – the commandment, recorded in our parshah, for the Jewish nation to bring a sacrifice to G-d every morning and evening – epitomizes our focus on today. Twice daily, we initiate a new bond with G-d. [Ramban contends that even the morning and evening offerings are separate, unique mitzvot; see Hasagot to Sefer haMitzvot, Shores 11.]

And yet, our parshah chains the *korban tamid* to history; the Torah states that we should bring this offering "as was brought at Mount Sinai." (Bamidbar 28:6) Here we learn that even the most modern mitzvah must incorporate the historical narrative of our nation; we have no Today unless it includes our Yesterdays. Or as neurologist Oliver Sacks wrote, "To be ourselves we must have ourselves – possess, if need be re-possess, our life-stories... A man needs such a narrative, a continuous inner narrative, to maintain his identity, his self." (*The Man Who Mistook his Wife for a Hat*, pp. 105–106) Recalling our past is more than just George Santayana's vaccine against recidivism; it is how we know whom we are.

Fascinatingly, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch argued that pursuit of self-knowledge should lead Jews to learn world history: "Here, then, we have a people that emerged from the course of world history, that was placed into the midst of the nations to advance the goals of world history, and that was endowed with historical vision. Should not the sons of such a people understand that historical studies of the development of nations are truly not superfluous, but that they are, in fact, virtually indispensable?" (*The Relevance of Secular Studies*, Collected Writings 7:97)

This lesson was not as crucial when Hashem first taught us to bring the *korban tamid*, when we still stood on the sand where we had received the Torah. The first appearance of this mitzvah, in

Shemot 29, omits the link to Sinai. But at that time, as noted by Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin, we had not yet sinned with the Golden Calf. (Ha'ameik Davar to Bamidbar 28:6) Forty years down the road, Hashem saw a need to anchor our identity in our formative past. Now we were taught that every day we must recall what we did in the past, in order to inform the spirituality of our future.

I write this in a reflective mood, as we reach the milestone of 500 issues of Toronto Torah. With Hashem leading us every step of the way, we have built on the idea of our avreich Itamar Zolberg, since Issue #1 appeared for Bereishit in Fall 2009. We have asked and answered Parshah Questions, reviewed books, memorialized Israeli Chief Rabbis, taught laws of Israeli farming, explored the entire Sefer haChinuch, discussed Israeli history, examined biographies, journeyed through books of Tanach, published travelogues on Israeli sites, and so much more. Thank you for learning with us, in synagogues and online. Thank you to our many generous sponsors over the years. May we learn from our Toronto Torah past, as we chart a path for the future.

Of course, the idea of incorporating our past into our future is particularly relevant as we enter the Three Weeks. May we finally correct the wrongs that are so deeply ingrained in our national psyche – the selfishness, the jealousy, the baseless and useless hatred – and build instead a society of respect and love and selflessness and humility.

Professor Yosef Yerushalmi wrote regarding the Passover Seder, "Both the language and the gesture are geared to spur, not so much a leap of memory, as a fusion of past and present." (*Zakhor*, pg. 44) May we fuse past and present in the *korban tamid* we bring each day – in our prayers, in our mitzvot, and G-d willing soon in our Beit haMikdash – and go on to build a glorious future.

OUR BEIT MIDRASH

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Welcome to Issue 500!

With immense gratitude to Hashem, we present to you the 500th issue of Toronto Torah. We are also thankful to all of the members of the Beit Midrash of the past twelve years, who consistently wrote high-quality articles on a broad range of subjects, on deadline, meeting exacting standards for both content and style. Additionally, we thank the dozens of families and individuals who have dedicated issues of Toronto Torah. And of course, we thank all of you, the readers who have made our efforts worthwhile – and especially those who have taken the time to correspond with us, evolving and amplifying the discussions which begin in these pages.

In this issue, we particularly acknowledge the many synagogues who have hosted Toronto Torah, making it available to thousands of Jews. Opening your doors to our publication has been a generous act of chesed to both congregants and to us, enabling a connection which benefits both teacher and student. It has also been an act of trust, which we work to earn with each issue. We hope you have found your trust well-placed.

To honour our synagogue partners, we invited the community's Rabbis to publish an article in Issue 500. Despite very busy schedules and responsibilities, twelve esteemed community leaders provided the Torah you will see in this issue, addressing either Parshat Pinchas or the "Three Weeks" period which began with the fast of the 17th of Tammuz and continues until Tishah b'Av. Recognizing and valuing the range of styles among the Rabbis in our community, we elected to forgo our normal editing policies, and instead present the Torah of each Rabbi as written.

To represent past writers of Toronto Torah, we called upon the Sganim of the Beit Midrash, past and present, to submit articles as well. We are glad to be able to present thoughts from many of them. We hope that seeing their Torah will be an experience of both nostalgia and learning for our community.

Finally: We are most grateful to Daniel Safran for his inspired work on the layout of this special issue of Toronto Torah. One of the lessons of the past twelve years of Toronto Torah has been the impact of graphic design, font choice and more on our ability to learn. Thank you, Daniel, for helping all of us to learn Torah.

We look forward to learning with you and publishing Toronto Torah, with Hashem's constant support, for a long time to come.

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Shaarei Shomayim Congregation

The Sanctity of the Routine

Rabbi Sammy Bergman • Sgan Rosh Beit Midrash, 2019–2021

Hashem describes the Korban Tamid, the daily elevation offered in the Temple, in surprisingly sentimental terms. In Bamidbar 28:2, Hashem instructs Moshe to command the Children of Israel to offer “My sacrifice, My bread, for My fire, My pleasing aroma” at its appropriate time.

What does G-d mean when He describes “His bread”, and “His pleasant aroma”? Certainly, Hashem doesn’t eat or enjoy pleasing scents. Even metaphorically, the use of possessive nouns in describing our daily service suggests that we are providing G-d with something! Furthermore, the Sages reinforce the idea that the Korban Tamid provides for Hashem. Rashi (Bamidbar 25:2) quotes a midrash (Sifrei Bamidbar 142) which notes the juxtaposition of the section dealing with the Korban Tamid to the previous section dealing with Moshe’s request to Hashem for a successor as the leader of the Jewish people. This midrash explains that after receiving Moshe’s request, Hashem said, “While you are taking care of my children, take care of me.” (Rashi ad. loc) How can the Sages depict the daily offering as a service which “takes care” of Hashem?

The description of the Korban Tamid in Pinchas seems even more problematic when contrasted with its counterpart in Parshat Tetzaveh. (Shemot 29:38-45) Thirty-nine years earlier, immediately after describing the construction plans for the Mishkan, Hashem instructed Moshe about the Korban Tamid with less sentimental language. In Parshat Tetzaveh Hashem doesn’t mention that the sacrifice is “His bread,” “His offering” or His pleasant aroma.” Why in Parshat Pinchas does Hashem wax poetic? Why does the Torah

repeat the mitzvah of the daily offering at all?

Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin (Haamek Davar on Bamidbar 28:2) suggests an inspiring approach to these difficulties based on the gap between the Jewish people’s location on their journey through the desert in Tetzaveh, and the stage of their sojourn in Pinchas. In Tetzaveh, the Children of Israel had just experienced a miraculous escape from Egypt and witnessed Divine revelation at Mount Sinai. They were about to construct the Mishkan, where one directly encountered G-d. In the tent of meeting, Moshe had frequent direct conversations with Hashem. Rabbi Berlin explains that the Korban Tamid facilitated that direct connection to Hashem’s Divine presence. Therefore, following the description of the Korban Tamid, the Torah writes: “It is an eternal elevation offering for you at the entrance of the tent of meeting where I will meet with you to speak with you there.” (29:42) The Korban Tamid created the atmosphere which shaped the nation of Israel’s life, a life spent dwelling in immediate proximity to G-d’s house on this Earth.

However, with the sin of the Golden Calf, followed by the tragedy of the spies, the Jewish people weakened their unique connection with the Hashem. The Sages tell us (Bava Batra 121a, Tosafot ad. loc.) that while Hashem was angry with the Jewish nation, Moshe no longer experienced the same direct, frequent prophecy. The Jewish people felt that the Korban Tamid no longer served its purpose of sustaining direct prophetic connection with G-d. Therefore, according to Rabbi Eliezer, they didn’t bring the Korban Tamid throughout their sojourn in the desert. (Chagigah 6b)

However, in Parshat Pinchas, the role of the Korban Tamid changed completely. The Jewish people now approached a new life in the land of Israel without frequent open miracles, or constant communication with Hashem. Therefore, it was a time for a new daily offering with a completely different function. Rabbi Berlin explains that the Tamid the Jews brought in Israel achieved hidden miracles. The Korban sustained G-d’s continual Divine providence. The possessive nouns “My bread” and “My pleasant aroma” connote the idea that through the offering, Hashem maintained His connection to this world. Bread is the primary form of sustenance which prevents one’s soul from leaving one’s body. Similarly, the Tamid “takes care of Hashem” by facilitating His connection to the world through His divine providence.

The Korban Tamid in Parshat Pinchas symbolizes the importance of the daily routine. Hashem instructed Moshe about the Tamid once again to urge Israel to continue its daily service despite lacking open miracles. The Torah describes the new daily offering as “made in Mount Sinai” (Bamidbar 28:6) to express that it was as precious to G-d as the sacrifices offered during at the sight of Divine Revelation.

The 500th issue of Toronto Torah serves as a symbol of the “Korban Tamid” that the Beit Midrash offers. Every week, Toronto Torah represents the consistent effort the members of the Beit Midrash to educate and inspire the Jewish community of the Greater Toronto Area. May Beit Midrash Zichron Dov continue to offer its Korban Tamid for many years!



Mazal tov to Rabbi Sammy Bergman on becoming Assistant Rabbi of Shaarei Shomayim Congregation!

Reverence and Consideration

Rabbi Yechezkel Gryzman • Zichron Yisroel Congregation

The commandment to love one's neighbour is one of the most popular axioms found in the Torah. It says in Vayikra (19:18), "Do not take revenge nor bear a grudge against the children of your people. *You must love your neighbor as [you love] yourself.* I am G-d." This verse is popularly interpreted by Rabbi Akiva as telling us not to do anything to our neighbour that we would not have done to ourselves. This slant is based on the words "as yourself" found in our verse.

Conversely, Ben Azzai opines that the phrase "I am your G-d" is the key to our verse, saying from Bereishit 5:1, "This is the book of the Chronicles of Adam: [On the day that G-d created man, He made him in the likeness of G-d]. This is a greater fundamental principle." Our reverence for the image of G-d embedded in man is a more compelling reason for neighbourly love than imagining ourselves in our neighbour's predicament. (Sifra, Kedoshim 2; Bereishit Rabbah 24:7)

Rabbi Ovadia Sforno (commentary to Vayikra 19:18) shifts the focus on the word "yourself" to the neighbour, suggesting that one should, "Desire for your neighbor what you would want for yourself if you were them." He thereby suggests that putting oneself in one's neighbour's shoes (empathy) is better than thinking about one's feelings (sympathy) in loving a neighbour. I see Sforno's switching the focus from sympathy to empathy as a call for us to be more considerate of others and more respectful of the G-dly image within us. We shall explore how this interplay between the reverential and the interpersonal is manifest in the way we look at halacha and life.

Proper fulfillment of the mitzvah of kibud av v'em, honouring parents, can be challenging. It is to this effect that the Shulchan Arukh encourages parents to make this task less

onerous for the child. (Yoreh Deah 240:19) At times, a talented child may even be relieved of the obligation of parental honour and the parent may choose to honour the child, as was the case with Rabbi Yishmael. (Tosafot Kiddushin 31b) Even under these circumstances, when parental honour is not performed, a tone of reverence must still exist between child and parent. (Shut Ridbaz 1:524, Rav Eliyahu Bakshi Doron *Devarim Sheyesh Lahem Shiur*) It is even suggested that the child should avoid receiving certain honours from the parent, such as pouring him water at a public meal, if it is felt that this would create parental discomfort. (*Encyclopedia Talmudit* 26:427; Meiri, Kidushin 31a)

In discussing the degree to which the deceased can release the mourners from mourning requirements, Shulchan Arukh (Yoreh Deah 344:10) says that the deceased can void eulogies and the year-long mourning rule for children since they were created out of consideration for the deceased. However, our reverence for rabbinic law requires *shiva* and *shloshim* to remain intact. With respect to a eulogy, Rav Haim Palaggi further limits the ability of Torah scholars to forgo a eulogy, since reverence for a Torah leader's influence on communal life takes precedence. (*Shu"t Chaim b'Yad* 105)

There are times when the tension between reverence and consideration is at the center of a halachic debate. For example, the standard rule for mourners over a parent is to not attend weddings for the entire year. According to some, one can forgo this rule when the family feels, with certainty, that attendance at a wedding would have been what the deceased wanted. (Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, *Hilchot Avelut*; Shlomo Brody, "May Parents Waive the Requirements of Avelut," *The Flatbush*

Journal of Jewish Law and Thought #29, Winter 2021) Others feel that we cannot rely on such a prediction, due to reverence for the established practice. (Rav Yakov Kamenetsky, *Emet L'Yakov* 391, note 239) Application of these rules requires one to oscillate between the consideration of feelings, and the deference required for standard practice.

In *The Lonely Man of Faith*, Rabbi Soloveitchik writes that we live life oscillating between "The Community of Majesty" and the "Faith Community". This tension makes "complete human redemption to be unattainable." (*The Lonely Man of Faith*, p. 82, Doubleday Edition.) The tensions that exist between the desire to accommodate (consideration) and to be properly reverent mirrors the ongoing struggle in the majesty/faith tension. Even though it can never be fully mastered, our ability to productively oscillate between reverence and consideration is central to our journey towards self-actualization.

The Gemara in Succah (28a) tells us that Rabban Yohanan ben Zakai was involved in the study of great things (davar gadol), such as Yechezkel's prophetic vision of the chariot, and small things (davar katan), such as the halachic debates of Abaye and Rava. How could anyone consider these debates, representative of the halachic process, something small?! The *Keter Shem Tov* (1:174) suggests that halachic debate that is focused solely on the joy of honing the intellect is a small thing, but when it becomes an extension of the spiritual experience, represented by the chariot, it becomes something great. Our communities are fortunate to have a Beit Midrash and Rosh Beit Midrash who ensure that all of the Torah they provide, big and small, is always connected to Yechezkel's chariot with consideration and reverence.

THE COLUMNS OF TORONTO TORAH Biography, Torah and Translation (5770-5781) • Book Review (5775-5777) • Calendar (5770-5771) • Ha'Aretz (5770-5772) • Haftorah (5773-5774) • Hitoriri: Jewish Spirituality (5772-5773) • Israel's Chief Rabbis (5777) • Israeli Landmark (5778) • Journey Through Tanach (5779-5781) • Law of the Land (5779-5780) • Parshah (5770-5781) • Parshah Q & A (5770-5771) • Random (5772-5773) • Shiur in Review (5770) • The 613 Mitzvot (5770-5780) • The Israeli Farmer (5781) • The Zionist Idea (5778) • This Week in Israeli History (5773-5776) • Torah for Your Table (5773)

Opening Ourselves Up

Rabbi Daniel Korobkin • Senior Rabbi, Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation

Tish'a B'Av will soon be upon us. One of the most moving Kinnos is Kinnah 11, which describes the tragic death of the 7th-century BCE Judean King Josiah (Yoshiyahu), a man who, by all accounts, was righteous and who dedicated his life to enacting religious reforms to strengthen Jewish practice.

As recorded in 2 Kings 22-23, Josiah succeeded in abolishing a great deal of idolatry that had previously been rampant throughout Judea. He also rediscovered many mitzvos from the book of Deuteronomy that had been forgotten by the majority of the populace, and succeeded in restoring many religious practices to Klal Israel. He also refurbished the Temple treasury and refurbished the Temple. All in all, Scripture states about him (ibid., v. 2): "He did that which was upright in the eyes of Hashem; he followed the path of David his ancestor, not deviating right or left." The Kinnah also relates that no other king so utterly reformed his people to righteousness.

Yet, he suffered a horrible battlefield death when going to war against the Egyptian Pharaoh Necho II. As related in II Chron. 25, and expounded in the Midrash (Eichah Rabbah 1:18), Necho II had politely requested rights of passage through Judea so that he could assist the Assyrians in their battle against the Babylonians. The prophet Jeremiah told Josiah that he should not oppose the Egyptian king. But King Josiah, believing that his people were righteous, felt that Hashem would side with him in blocking foreign armies from Eretz Israel, in accord with the biblical blessing of (Lev. 26:6), "No sword shall pass through your land." In reality, Josiah had not succeeded in fully eradicating idolatry; people were still covertly worshipping idols. Josiah rejected the prophet's advice, went out to war against Necho II, and was roundly defeated in battle.

The Midrash – as well as the Kinnah – graphically describe how he was killed:

The enemy shot him through with 300 arrows, until his body became like a sieve. Jeremiah ran over to him to hear his final words (from Lam. 1:18): "G-d is righteous, for I have rebelled against His word."

Shortly before his death, Josiah realized that he had erred by not heeding Jeremiah. Yet it seems so unfair that a righteous king who brought about so much spiritual growth for his people should suffer such a horrible death. In trying to make sense of this, let's look at another instance where the Sages talk about the very same kind of violent death, many centuries after Josiah.

The Talmud (Avoda Zara 8b) relates the story of Rabbi Yehuda b. Bava. He was a student of Rabbi Akiva, and lived during a particularly precarious time, when the Romans banned all forms of Torah study.

Had it not been for [R' Yehuda b. Bava] the laws of fines would have been forgotten from among the Jewish people... At one time, the wicked kingdom of Rome issued decrees against the Jewish people. They said: anyone who ordains judges or is ordained will be killed... What did Rabbi Yehuda ben Bava do? He went and sat... in a desolate place that was not associated with any particular city, and there he ordained five Elders, namely: Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Yehuda, Rabbi Shimon, Rabbi Yosei, and Rabbi Elazar ben Shammua... When the enemies discovered them, Rabbi Yehuda ben Bava said to the newly ordained rabbis: My sons, run for your lives. They said to him: Our teacher, and what will be with you? He said to them: I am cast before them like a stone that cannot be overturned; even if you attempt to assist me I will not be able to escape due to my frailty, but if you do not escape without me you will also be killed. People later said: The Roman soldiers did

not move from there until they had inserted three hundred iron spears into his body, making his body appear like a sieve.

Why do our Sages assign the same type of death – being pierced 300 times until the body is like a sieve – to both Josiah and R' Yehuda b. Bava?

Let's look at one more Talmudic source for our final clue (Sanhedrin 91b-92a):

Anyone who withholds a halakhah from his student is cursed even by fetuses in their mothers' womb... Moreover, such a person will be pierced through like a sieve...

In explaining this passage, Maharsha (ad loc.) writes that the idea of piercing a scholar's body is just dessert to a person who possessed so much Torah but refused to openly share his knowledge with others. A Torah scholar is like a container which contains fragrant perfume. If it is completely sealed, no one can benefit. By piercing it through with holes, others can now imbibe and enjoy the rich fragrance of Torah knowledge.

Rabbi Yehuda b. Bava was forced to grant semichah to five great scholars of his time under tremendous duress. The sage was punished because he procrastinated ordaining these rabbis during a time when the Torah was in danger of being forgotten because of Roman persecution. R' Yehuda b. Bava should have granted ordination long before this episode, but for some reason – perhaps he thought his students simply weren't ready, or perhaps he felt that they wouldn't judge as well as he – he waited until the last possible moment before ordaining the next generation. This is why his body was "pierced through," teaching the moral lesson that one should not be so retentive and proprietary

Cont. on page 7

THE WRITERS OF TORONTO TORAH Rabbi Elihu Abbe • Rabbi Sammy Bergman • Rabbi Azarya Berzon • Ezer Diena • Rabbi Adam Frieberg • Rabbi Adam Friedmann • Rabbi Ezra Goldschmiedt • Rabbi David Ely Grundland • Rabbi Josh Gutenberg • Rabbi Alex Hecht • Hillel Horovitz • Rabbi Netanel Javasky • Russell Levy • Rabbi Meir Lipschitz • Rabbi Yair Manas • Rabbi Chaim Metzger • Yaron Perez • Rabbi Yisroel Meir Rosenzweig • Rabbi David Teller • Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner • Rabbi Baruch Weintraub • Rabbi Jonathan Ziring • Rabbi Dovid Zirkind • Itamar Zolberg

When You are Big, Nothing is Small

Rabbi Rafi Lipner • Shaarei Tefillah Congregation

It's always hard to step into someone else's shoes, to take on a new leadership role, especially when the previous CEO who is retiring was pretty awesome.

So imagine what the search committee would define as the criteria necessary to fill the shoes of none other than Moshe Rabbeinu. If you had to put together the job description, what are the qualities that you would be looking for in the person who will take over the position of Moshe Rabbeinu, the greatest leader and teacher of the Jewish people?

As we all know, Yehoshua was chosen for the position. The question is why? One might think that what made him cut out to be the leader was his ability to withstand the pressure from the meraglim, the spies, and remain steadfast in his emunah in Hashem. Or perhaps it was his willingness to support Moshe and stand by his side in the battle against our arch enemy Amalek.

However, the midrash in Bamidbar Rabbah 21:15 tells a different story. What was the great indicator that you couldn't find a better man for the position than Yehoshua? The midrash tells us that it was because Yehoshua was the one who got up early and arranged the benches in the beit midrash and put out the tablecloths so that everything looked respectful and ready for business, and then left late once everything was organized again.

Now, if you take a step back for a second,

this should strike you as very odd. The leadership position does not usually consist of custodial duties, and even if it did, one would not assume that quality to be the highest on the list of must haves. So why was this so important that it got Yehoshua the top job?

Rav Moshe Shternbach, shlita, in his sefer Ta'am V'Daas explains that one can learn a lot about a person from the way that they pay attention to the small details. A person who only cares about the big details often does so because they see great personal honour in being involved with those projects. However, someone who is attuned to the smallest of details, and for whom no job is beneath their dignity, shows that they are involved simply because of their deep commitment to and passion for the cause.

Yeshoshua took care of even the smallest details involved in kavod haTorah and the dissemination of Torah because he cared deeply about Torah. If you want to know what makes a great leader, it's someone who passionately cares about the mission, and in this case, the transmission of Torah. The details tell the true story of a person and his values.

Rav Yeruchem Levovitz, the famed mashgiach of the Mir Yeshiva, in his sefer Da'as Torah (Shemos, page 5) discusses how, in reality, there are no objectively big or small things. Rather it all depends on the individual. A true Adam Gadol, a great person, sees the gigantic importance behind even the smallest details, while in contrast,

small-minded individuals can look at even the most important things, and treat them like garbage. They say you judge a society by how it cares for its most vulnerable. So too, you see the true character of the leader by the way they treat the seemingly irrelevant details, because if one really cares, no detail is irrelevant. And that is why Yehoshua was the most deserving candidate to succeed Moshe.

I would be remiss if I didn't add that this is also how one can see the greatness of the Beit Midrash Zichron Dov. It is easy to run a big conference, to have gala learning events, or to only focus on one segment of the community when trying to spread Torah. But over the years, we have been privileged to see the Kollel, under the leadership of Rabbi Torczyner, focus on the details, the smaller events, the day-to-day. The tremendous level of Torah teaching and learning is only matched by the love and attention given to every detail, every one of the dozens of weekly shiurim, every audience – robust or not, the topics that are addressed, and even the creative titles and promotion. No detail is too small, because when one wants to lead Klal Yisrael towards greater Limud Torah and Ahavas HaTorah, every individual, every publication, every topic, every setting, every Jew, is not small; it is all big.

Mazel tov on reaching the "Fortune 500" edition! Wishing Beit Midrash Zichron Dov continued hatzlacha in being marbitz Torah through all of the "little" things you do.

DID YOU KNOW? We have held 13 Sunday Midreshet Yom Rishon ZOOM programs for women since COVID began • More than 300 people signed in at five CPD-approved ZOOM Legal Ethics programs during COVID • We have offered seven "Halachah in Modern Israel" ZOOM sessions during COVID • Even in lockdown, we offered live and asynchronous chaburot for Bnei Akiva Schools students. • We held 7 Medical Ethics/Halachah ZOOM programs in COVID with nearly 500 participants • We engage in internal learning until 12:30 PM daily; this year, we have been studying Shemitah. • We learn one-on-one with approximately 20 chavrutot by ZOOM each week • We held 10 CE-eligible ZOOM Business Ethics sessions in COVID, with more than 300 registrants • More than 160 people receive Toronto Torah every week by email.

Pinchas: What Really is the Point of the Spear?

Rabbi Avram Rothman • Senior Rabbi, Aish Thornhill Community Shul

Parshat Pinchas and its relating of how Pinchas literally impales two people with a spear in a very public setting, teaches that violent zeal is a positive trait for a Jew to have. Apparently, we should admire the zealots among us and raise our children accordingly, even to the point of violence. Just read how the Torah describes Pinchas, his actions and how the Almighty responds to him. This Parsha seems to teach that the extremism and violence that is found among such groups as the Taliban or ISIS is something that we should strive to achieve. We should, as Pinchas did, exhibit the “wrath of G-d” towards people who do not practice as we do and make sure that they “pay” for their actions. The Parsha, apparently, tells us that acting as a zealot is not only praiseworthy, but it stopped the plague which instantaneously killed thousands of Jews.

These acts of violent zeal are not only seen in these extremist groups, but we are seeing it more and more in our Western society. We can all agree, racism, sexism, bigotry and prejudice are real and are abhorrent. The question is, what do we do to stop their systemic effect? Some feel in their zeal, that rioting in the streets, looting and destroying property will send a clear message that such bigotry, racism and sexism will not be tolerated. Striking those who represent the perpetuation of racism, for example, is necessary to change the world. Fighting in the streets, attacking those whom appear to represent racism must be destroyed. This teaches the world how wrong racism is. Others feel, in their zeal, that

about sharing Torah knowledge and Torah authority.

We may perhaps now understand why King Josiah is depicted in the same way. He had such a pristine outlook of his people and his faith, that he felt that he needed to block any foreign access to his country. He, too, was overly retentive and not interested in opening his borders to others. Perhaps Josiah had the same attitude as R' Yehuda b. Bava. The sage believed that as long as judgment authority remained with him

rooting out celebrities and political figures who have exhibited racist, sexist or bigoted beliefs should be “cancelled” from society, stripped of their roles and forced to apologize.

Based on Parshat Pinchas, we learn that we must instil fear into the hearts of those who go against these basic human beliefs.

We need to stand tall, as Pinchas did and awaken the public to the horrible acts being done. If we must fight in the streets, then fight we will. Clearly, the blessing of “Briti Shalom”, a covenant of peace, given to Pinchas by G-d in response to his actions, and the halting of the plague show us all that the Almighty expects no less from us.

Still, zealotry was uniquely appropriate for Pinchas, but it is hard to accept that we are commanded to act in the same manner. Acts of violence DO NOT change society. Violence and zeal will hinder the bigots from acting on their beliefs, but it will not change those beliefs. What are we to learn from the story of Pinchas, the zealot that saves the Jewish people from destruction? It seems to be that the route the Torah applauds, yet, it also does not seem to be the Torah way.

To better understand, let's examine the “Covenant of Peace” that G-d awards Pinchas based on his violent act.

Watching current events, be it the executioners of ISIS or those rioting in the USA, one sees that the more someone participates, the more violent one becomes. An executioner may have nightmares about executing someone,

alone, Torah rulings would remain pristine and pure. He withheld ordination from his students out of a concern that their jurisprudence might not be as pure and expert as his own. King Josiah might have felt the same way about the purity and holiness of Judea. He could not afford to risk allowing the kedushah of his land to become contaminated by granting access to a foreign entity.

The moral lessons, of course, are self-evident. On the one hand, we need to work hard at preserving the holiness of our community.

however, after executing one or two, the act becomes easier. G-d's promise to Pinchas was a covenant of peace, that is, even though Pinchas acted violently with zeal and killed two leaders, he will never grow accustomed to the blood. You have an agreement with Me, says the Almighty, and on the very rare occasion that a violent act of zeal is required, it will not affect you nor change you – *you will still have peace.*

What the Torah is clearly teaching is that zealotry resulting in violence is not the way! In fact, on the very rare occasion that it is required, it is so unique that – I promise it will not corrupt or harden you, says G-d. Being a zealot is like using radioactive material. It has a very rare purpose and when used, it is in small amounts and it has ramifications. Awareness may come through zeal, but true change comes through a covenant of peace, through mutual respect, achieving consensus and education.

One of our most important goals as Jews is to rid the world of bigotry, sexism, anti-Semitism, et al. To see that people are judged by whom they are within, not who they are outside. Pinchas is the exception, not the rule. We need to change the world. But to change it with respect, openness, unity and trust rather than with a stone or gun.

But this effort cannot come at the expense of excluding others from access to the richness and texture of the Judaism that we enjoy. Perhaps one of the messages of these Three Weeks is that we should not seek to merely attend to our and our families' spiritual well-being. We should “open up” our doors and our hearts to others so that they, too, can share in the holiness of our Torah.

I am grateful to Mr. Charles Wagner, Esq., for suggesting that I write this essay.

A COVID Tisha b'Av

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In times like these, how can we even observe Tisha b'Av?

Traditionally, three weeks before the deepest, darkest day of the year, beginning on Shiva Asar b'Tammuz, we begin to lessen our joy. We stop taking haircuts, we don't wear new clothes, we don't see live music or performances.

But doesn't that describe a way of life that has become the day-to-day for us, during the coronavirus pandemic? We all have shaggier, unkempt hair; our standards of dress have become less than stylish, to say the least; and the notion of attending a concert at this moment induces a chilling sense of horror.

The nine days, traditionally, further intensify this practice of deprivation and abnegation. We cease eating meat and drinking wine, we lessen the presence of music in our lives. Many of us are asking, and quite rightly, how our Jewish practice could ask us to add further sadness and difficulty in our lives. We've been living the Eighteen Weeks of quarantine; how can we possibly find meaning in this ritual of immiseration?

As in all things, our Talmud has wisdom to share. In the final passage of the tractate Makot, the Talmud tells of an early rabbinic outing to the Temple mount. Remember that the Tannaim, the rabbis of the Mishnaic period, lived in the late first and into the second century CE, so the destruction of the Beit haMikdash is not legendary but rather recent history.

The passage tells of Rabbi Akiba and his colleagues traveling to Jerusalem. When they arrive at Mount Scopus (Har haTzofim), in view of the Temple ruin, they rend their clothing, according to the custom of ritual mourning. In today's halachic practice, we ritualize this act, but in the Talmud it is clear that it is an expression of authentic anguish. We tear our clothes, which stand in place of

us, materializing the torn and rent state we inhabit.

When they reach the Temple Mount, they see a fox emerge from the site of the Holy of Holies. The Rabbis begin to weep and wail... except for Rabbi Akiba. He begins to laugh.

His friends are astounded. They ask him, why are you laughing?? Rabbi Akiba, ever the sharp one, rejoins, "Why are you crying?" To which they reply, "Where once a non-Priest would be punished for treading on this holiest of ground, they answer, and now a fox can frolic as it pleases?!"

Rabbi Akiba says, "That is precisely why I am laughing. In Micah (3:12), a prophecy describes Zion as plowed like a field, with Jerusalem reduced to rubble, and the Temple Mount overrun with vegetative growth. And in Zechariah (8:4), he prophesies that there will once more be elderly women and men sitting in the streets of Jerusalem. It was only when I witnessed the fox darting about the ruined state of the Temple that I knew that the first prophecy was fulfilled, that the promise of Zechariah, of a repopulated holy space, would be on its way."

Our holy spaces are depopulated, and the very structures our community relies have been destabilized. However, Rabbi Akiba was able to survey a site of destruction and see within in the promise of redemption. This does not deny what it is that we are experiencing together. Indeed, I would say that the world events we are living through perfectly encapsulate the meaning of this period. The security of our home has been undermined. The situation in which we are living is doing the spiritual work of Tisha b'Av for us.

What is left for us to do is not pile on more and more misery (I have been heartened to see many poskim take a humane and compassionate tack in their rulings during this period), but rather to take it all in. We can

encompass both Rabbi Akiba and his friends. His colleagues witnessed the holy ruins and wept, crushed by what we had lost. Today, we look at missed birthdays, longed-for events, the normal intimacy of social life, and we feel gutted. Tisha b'Av gives us the time we need to mourn what we have lost. But, as the day progresses, it moves from melancholy and isolation to reconnection and the glimmer of redemption. At mincha, we begin saying hello to people once more, and we can add comfort back to our lives, when we sit on full chairs. We, like Rabbi Akiba, can find the laughter within the tears, perhaps the most Jewish thing to do.

We feel the truth of the loss, but not to punish ourselves, but rather to fully and truly value what it is that we love and cherish. We mourn the Temple each year to keep it near to our hearts, to feel the presence of its absence. We carve an empty space where it once stood, and we make that space in our lives for it to be rebuilt.

May we hear the laughter ringing in our ears, bringing comfort when we need it most.

Moshe, Tzelofchad's Daughters, and Eretz Yisrael

Rabbi Baruch Weintraub • Sgan Rosh Beit Midrash, 2011–2013

Informing Moshe Rabbeinu that the daughters of Tzelofchad should be granted their wish for a share in the land of Yisrael, G-d emphasized, "Tzelofchad's daughters spoke justly." (Bamidbar 27:7) To this Rashi adds a puzzling comment: "It is said here that their eye perceived what the eye of Moshe did not."

What did the eyes of the daughters of Tzelofchad see that Moshe's could not? Certainly, the daughters of Tzelofchad were righteous, wise, and knowledgeable. But were they more righteous, wiser, or more knowledgeable than Moshe Rabbeinu, via whom the Torah was given?

It is interesting to note that the daughters of Tzelofchad are of the tribe of Menasheh, of the sons of Yosef. In contrast to Moshe, Yosef's bones were buried in the Land of Israel. A midrash tells us that after Moshe realized that G-d would not bring him alive into the land, he said, "Master of the universe, Yosef's bones entered the land and I do not enter the land?" The Blessed One responded to him: He who admitted that the land is his, will be buried in his land, and he who did not admit, will not be buried in his land. When Potiphar's wife said, "Look, he brought us a Hebrew man," Yosef did not deny, but admitted it and said, "I was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews." On the other hand, when the daughters of Yitro said, "An Egyptian man had saved us from the shepherds," Moshe heard and was silent, therefore he will not be buried in his land." (Devarim Rabbah, Va'etchanan 2)

But can it really be said that Moshe Rabbeinu

lacked fondness for the Land of Yisrael? G-d forbid! After all, he prayed no fewer than 515 prayers in hope to enter the Land. (Midrash Aggadah, Va'etchanan 3:23) The difference lies, I believe, in the way Moshe saw the land. The Talmud tells us, "Rabbi Simlai asked why Moshe Rabbeinu wanted to enter Eretz Yisrael. Did he need to eat its fruits? Did he need to satisfy himself from its goodness? Rather, this is what Moshe said: Many mitzvot were commanded to the Israelites, and some of them can be fulfilled only in Eretz Yisrael, so I will enter the land in order that they can all be fulfilled by me." (Sotah 14a) Moshe Rabbeinu was entirely a servant of Hashem, and so his will to enter the land was centered on the mitzvot that apply only in the land. He saw in the land a means and tool for worshiping G-d. Therefore, when the daughters of Yitro said that he was an Egyptian man, it did not bother him. Egyptian, Midianite or Israeli – everything is equal, as long as all of these forces are turned to the work of G-d.

But the daughters of Tzelofchad, the descendants of Yosef, said something else: the land is not just a means. Your country, they observed, is part of your identity. Just like your family: "Our father died in the wilderness... in his sin he died and had no sons. Why should our father's name be removed from his family for he has no sons? Give us an inheritance among our father's brothers." (Bamidbar 27:3-4) In other words, they were telling Moshe, "It may be that for you, our master, who are wholly dedicated to the work of G-d, such 'small' issues as name, legacy or land inheritance may seem unimportant. But for us, say the

daughters of Tzelofchad, the Land of Israel, the house, the estate, all of these are part of who we are and of our identity."

To this G-d said, "The daughters of Tzelofchad spoke justly." (ibid. 27:7) Indeed, their eye saw something that Moshe, precisely because of his greatness, did not see. What Moshe – the "man of G-d" – transcended, the daughters of Tzelofchad understood to be an important part in the human puzzle.

All of us, regular men and women, are not Moshe Rabbeinu. Rather, we are much closer to the daughters of Tzelofchad. The Torah, the Halachah, the tradition, the Land of Israel and the people of Israel – all of these we observe and take care of because they are the pure truth, as Moshe Rabbeinu would. But we also see them as part of who we are. We are Israelites – the people who abide with the G-d of Yisrael; who heed to the Torah of Yisrael; who continue the long history of the children of Yisrael. This is our identity, this is our home, and this is also what we will pass on to our children.

The daughters of Tzelofchad were, indeed, correct.



We are most grateful to Rabbi Baruch Weintraub for **ten years** of enlightening and inspirational Toronto Torah columns!

The Challenge of Modernity and the Case of Daughters' Inheritance

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring • Sgan Rosh Beit Midrash, 2014–2018

The realities of the modern world often diverge in significant ways from the era of Chazal or the Torah. This often presents halachic challenges. In many cases, “loopholes” are established to allow “circumventing” the letter of the law to enable halacha to be practiced in the modern world. However, often so much energy is expended in ensuring the loopholes technically fulfill all the legal requirements, that a more fundamental question is left out. If the Torah is a book of values, and not just laws, one should not want to get around the law – one should seek to embrace it. To justify utilizing a loophole religiously, not just legally, one must understand the broader message of the Torah.

As my teacher, Rabbi Moshe Lichtenstein [has written](#), mitzvot are both obligations and opportunities. On the one hand, we fulfil the commandments out a sense of obligation; on the other hand, “observance of the mitzvot is not just a command and an assignment, but also a favor that G-d performs for His creatures. In other words, the mitzvot are an expression of G-d’s love for His creations, and His desire to fill them with merit.”

Based on this, Rabbi Lichtenstein argues that a loophole, or *ha'arama*, “is a halachic mechanism intended to circumvent the formal aspect of a prohibition. In other words, it is a stratagem that provides the possibility of evading the obligating imperative, by creating conditions in which the details of the mitzva do not apply. However, all that this can do is provide an exemption from the letter of the law, but it is incapable of providing an answer to the fact that the spirit of the law is not fulfilled and is not achieved, and that the person who utilizes the circumvention fails in that way. Formally, he does not violate any prohibition, but spiritually, his course is flawed. *Ha'arama* is, therefore, regarded as a negative phenomenon, and despite its efficacy, there is no justification to use it.”

Rabbi Lichtenstein argues that one can religiously justify a *ha'arama* but showing that the situation we face is so different from that described in the Torah, that the original value is not met by the fulfillment of the law without the loophole.

Our parshah provides a pointed example. The daughters of Tzelofchad challenge Moshe, claiming that they deserve to inherit their father’s portion, as there are no sons. G-d concurs, and in His response, establishes that while sons take precedence, if there are no sons, daughters inherit. While Chazal (Yerushalmi Bava Batra 8:1) record a non-Jewish view that granted equal inheritance rights to sons and daughters, this was rejected by Chazal. Even a view that this would be the case when inheriting from a mother, though raised by R. Zecharia ben HaKatzav (Tosefta Bava Batra 7:10) was rejected by both the Talmud Bavli (111a) and Yerushalmi (above).

Over the centuries, however, several legal ways to enable daughters to inherit, either partially or fully like sons, have been offered. These include documents that create artificial debts to the daughter that can be paid off with portions equivalent to the inheritance of sons (*shtar chazti/kulo zachar*) and communal decrees used in several Middle Eastern countries and proposed by the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Yitzchak HaLevi Herzog. (*Techuka L'Yisrael al Pi Torah* volume 2)

Some authorities opposed at least some of these measures, claiming that the Torah’s system of inheritance reflects its values and should not be changed, even when technical mechanisms can be found. This, for example, was the position of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook (Igrot HaRa”ayah 1:176) and Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya Karelitz (letter to Rabbi Herzog).

However, Rabbi Herzog countered that finding ways for daughters to inherit was

in consonance with Torah values. He provided several arguments, including:

1. Chazal already found ways to ensure that daughters received portions of their father’s estate, through requirements of support and guaranteed dowries from the estate (see Ketubot 52b).
2. Rabbi Dovid ben Zimra, Radbaz (Metzudat David 530) cited attacks from non-Jewish scholars for the Torah’s discrimination. To counter this, the Radbaz argued that the Torah trusted that sons would provide for daughters from the estate, thus minimizing the need for formal inheritance (which for mystical reasons he felt should go to sons.)
3. The conviction that the Torah desires for daughters to receive significant portions of the estate can be seen from the aforementioned mechanisms used by halachic authorities, to the point where Rabbi Herzog cites S.Y. Agnon recording the horror that the community felt when a Chasidic Rabbi in Galicia did not provide functional inheritance for his daughters.

Based on this, Rabbi Herzog argued that the rationale of the Torah, and the evidence from rabbinic mechanisms, prove that the Torah’s values support finding workarounds, especially when the reality is such that daughters will not otherwise receive portions of the estate, thus justifying his attempt to establish decrees directly granting daughters inheritance.

What this example highlights is that it is not enough to find formal ways to solve “problems” that modernity may bring. To do justice to the Torah, it is necessary to explore both the values and letter of the law. Only then can we face modernity while respecting both the “obligations and opportunities” that the Torah offers us.

Self-Satisfaction and Humility

Rabbi Elihu Abbe • Sgan Rosh Beit Midrash, 2018-2019

What is the right balance between satisfaction in your accomplishments and humility?

There are two juxtaposed midrashim in our Parsha that shed light on this question. The first Medrash (Medrash Rabba, 21:22) presents an apparent contradiction between two verses. One verse states, “We have not found G-d to be of overbearing strength.” (Iyov 37:23) The second verse states, “G-d will rise up with His strength.” (Iyov 36:22) The Medrash answers, “When G-d bestows upon us, He gives with full strength. When He asks of us, He asks only according to our strength.” The Medrash goes on to provide examples. G-d asked that we build Him a Mishkan of a mere ten curtains. In the future, He will build a chuppah for each tzaddik comprised of magnificent clouds of glory. G-d asked us that we light a mere menorah of pure olive oil, whereas G-d provided us with light through

a pillar of fire, and in the future, He will provide us with the light of His Glory.

The next medrash relates that the Jewish people say to G-d, “You granted peace and prosperity to the generation preceding the Flood and they did not offer You anything in return. In fact, they rebelled against You. The Jewish people however thanked You for the greatness that You bestowed upon them.”

The first medrash is humbling. G-d bestows upon us with royal largesse and all we can do in return is serve Him with meek mortal abilities. The second medrash is uplifting. We credit ourselves with being amongst the few who appreciate and thank G-d for his gifts.

I once asked my Rebbe, Rav Mordechai Willig Shlit”a, the following question. The Mishna in Pirkei Avos (2:8) teaches us “If you have learned much Torah, don’t claim credit for yourself, because it is for this that you were

created.” Seemingly this Mishna is contradicted by the verse, “For only with this may one glorify himself – contemplating and knowing Me.” (Yirmiyah 9:23, Artscroll translation) Torah knowledge is knowledge of Hashem and thus we see that one may glorify himself and claim credit for having learned much Torah.

Rav Willig answered that we may take credit for a job well done, but we should not believe that we have done beyond what is expected of us, for in truth, “it is for this that we were created”.

It is essential that you recognize your accomplishments and that you enjoy the satisfaction of a job well done. Together with this recognition, realize that G-d gives us infinitely more than we could ever return. All our endeavors, be they for G-d or for man, are our efforts to live up to what G-d expects of us.

Breaking the Peace

Rabbi Messod Azoulay • Magen David Congregation

In 2015, world leaders agreed to seventeen Global Goals (officially known as the Sustainable Development Goals). Some of the goals listed, in order to create a better world for all, is a world without poverty, without hunger, with quality education for all and of course world peace.

Peace is one of the main themes in our Parasha as Pinchas was awarded the covenant of peace from Hashem for killing Zimri and Kozbi during their despicable act of Chillul Hashem. Let’s look at this story a bit closer and glean some important lessons from it.

It’s written in the Pasuk (Bamidbar 25:11) that Pinchas was the son of Elazar who was the son of Aharon HaKohen. But for what purpose does the Torah mention that Pinchas was the descendant of Aharon? Once we know he’s the son of Elazar, we know that he’s the grandson of Aharon!?

Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky zt”l answers that after Pinchas killed Zimri for consorting with a Midianite woman, the Jews considered him to be a murderer infused with the character trait of anger. The Torah therefore teaches us that Pinchas was a descendant of Aharon who himself was known as a lover and pursuer of peace. Therefore, Pinchas as well was the bearer of this quality and not an anger-driven killer.

So the first thing we need to learn before doing acts of peace is that we must have the right intentions and mindset when going into the act. Anger and any other personal biases will always be on display and will therefore result in an improper act of peace.

Additionally, if we look closely at the Pasuk, Bamidbar 25:12, in the Torah scroll, you will see that the word שלום (peace) is spelled with a broken “vav”. What is the meaning of this broken letter? Usually a broken letter in the Torah renders the entire Torah invalid!?

An explanation I once saw is that the Torah is teaching us that we sometimes have to break up “peace” in order to succeed in bringing true peace. For example, the Gemara teaches (Sanhedrin 72a) that “the gathering of evil people is bad for them and bad for the world.” We see that peace is not always a good thing! Not all peer gatherings are necessarily positive, and one must distance himself from evil people. On the other hand we know that “all the paths of Torah are peace.” (Mishlei 3:18) The path of Torah represents the path of true peace, and this implies that other paths are fraught with danger. We must be careful in life to always choose the most proper path.

May we take these lessons of Shalom and become people of peace.

The Little Yud

Rabbi Dr. Seth Grauer • The Or Chaim Minyan

Imagine you're on a flight. Moments before landing, the pilot faints, and – just your luck – the co-pilot has a heart attack at exactly the same time. The flight attendant calls for anyone who knows how to fly a plane to rush to the cockpit immediately. An old man in row 12 calmly gets up, makes his way to the cockpit and safely lands the aircraft.

In an identical scenario, no one answers the flight attendant's call. Suddenly, a passenger stands up and says, "If I can receive instructions from the control tower, I'll give it a go." He does and he safely lands the aircraft. Obviously the second guy will score higher on the ratings and become an overnight celebrity.

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin in his sefer, *Oznayim LaTorah*, writes that this was Pinchas. Pinchas was a regular guy, a simple Jew, which is hinted at by the little 'yud' in his name (Bamidbar 25:11). Apart from his birth, we know nothing of Pinchas aside from this incident. Moshe

and Aharon, however, were the national pilots, moving the people from place to place. That was their job and that was what was expected of them.

Pinchas certainly could have done nothing. There were plenty of elders and leaders in the camp and each of them chose not to get involved. Pinchas acted. He did something. And ultimately, Pinchas's actions saved the people.

And that's why Pinchas merited a Brit Shalom (a covenant of peace) while Moshe and Aharon did not. Even though he only saved the people once (intervening to halt a display of public immorality), while Moshe and Aharon had already done so on several occasions.

A beautiful message that we can take away from this is that each and every one of us can look for times in our lives where we can be a "little yud." We need to be vigilant to first look for those opportunities, try and recognize the

needs and then be ready to jump up and act when the need arises.

We may find ourselves at a critical moment when it is our actions that can avert tragedy or simply make an impact on others. The moments to act may not seem heroic and they certainly likely won't involve saving lives. We may find ourselves in situations with the opportunity to stand up to injustice, hatred, antisemitism, inequality, discrimination, etc., when the norm is to turn a blind eye and say, "What difference can I make anyway?" "Why should I get involved?" "It's not my responsibility." We need to remember that it is our responsibility and we can do more than we realize.

Most of us won't accomplish what Pinchas was able to and we certainly won't be guiding planes to safety, however, if we see ourselves as "little yuds" and look for opportunities when they arise, we absolutely can have a great impact on the entire world.

The Importance of Communal Torah Learning Institutions

Rabbi Noam Horowitz • Congregation Ayin l'Tzion

Many have the custom to say "Mah Tov" as they enter shul or beit midrash each morning. This pasuk appears in Bilam's third blessing of Bnei Yisroel in Parshat Balak. (Bamidbar 24:5) A number of Midrashic sources interpret *ohalecha* and *mishkenotecha* ("tents" and "dwelling places"), which Bilam blessed, as references to synagogues and study halls.

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 105b) cites Rabbi Yochanan as commenting regarding this verse, "From the blessing of that wicked man you learn what was in his heart." Rabbi Yochanan understood Bilam's blessings as a mirror image of the curses he had sought to place upon Bnei Yisrael. His admiration for the nation's synagogues and study halls thus reflected his desire to place upon them a curse that they should have no such institutions.

We might explain Rabbi Yochanan's comment in light of the background given in Bava Batra 60a. Bilam became inspired to proclaim this blessing upon seeing Am Yisrael "residing

according to their tribes." (24:2) The Gemara interprets that their doors did not face one another. What impressed Bilam was the people's concern for the privacy of others.

Though the people's sensitivity to each other's privacy evoked admiration, it may have also revealed a weakness that could be exploited as a curse. If the people conduct themselves too privately, isolated from their neighbours, religious practice will become overly individualized and subjective. Bilam saw Bnei Yisrael's respect for privacy and realized that this respect could, over time, result in the disintegration of the standardized observance of the Torah.

Bilam therefore sought to eliminate the public religious institutions, which lend Torah observance a communal quality. These institutions bind Jewish households to one another and place each within a broader, standardized way of life. Participation in communal study and practice helps ensure

that, notwithstanding personal custom, Torah observance retains a degree of consistency. Bilam therefore endeavored to obliterate the communal aspect of Jewish religious life; within the isolated confines of each household, Judaism would gradually become distinct and then entirely dissociated from the practices observed by the rest of the nation.

Thankfully, "the Lord your G-d transformed the curse for you into a blessing, for the Lord your G-d loves you" (Devarim 23:6). Bilam's curse became an eternal blessing for the proliferation of public institutions of Jewish learning and service, thereby securing the survival of our collective religious identity. Especially during this past year, when many felt isolated in their homes, Beit Midrash Zichron Dov was constantly there helping us turn each home into a "Mishkan Yisroel", filled with community shiurim and divrei Torah. Thank You BMZD!

Our Unique *Morashá*

Rabbi Yirmiya Milevsky • Congregation B'nai Torah

In Parashat Pinchas the Torah tells us that all those counted in the census will receive their own share of land in Eretz Yisrael. There is a well known disagreement between Rashi and the Ramban: Did all tribes receive equal shares, or did the more populated ones receive a larger portion? An interesting approach to this question is presented by Rabbi Ovadia Sforno (1470–1550). He notes that division of the land was indeed into twelve equal parts, but not in size, rather in value. Thus a large tribe would get more land for all members of the tribe, but of lesser value. The small tribes on the other hand would get a small area of great value. Based on this distribution he explains that the tribe of Shimon, who was less populous than all the other tribes when they entered the land, received a small part of great value. Since it would be hard to find one location with land of great monetary worth, Shimon settled in several places in Judea, apart from one another.

It is possible to see in the words of the Sforno more than just information about the conquest of Eretz Yisrael, but also some clear guidance in our journey through our life of Torah.

In the Torah, two things are described as a *Morashá* (legacy or heritage). One is Eretz Yisrael, and the other one is Torah. It is not a coincidence that the same word is used, because the two are very much intertwined. One cannot fulfill all of Torah without Eretz Yisrael, and our nation will never succeed in the Promised Land without Torah.

When it comes to living a Torah life a person must understand that every person has their own area to conquer. The mission of my neighbor is not the same as mine. Consequently, in our prayers we turn to the Almighty and ask Him for guidance to figure out what our personal mission is. Thus, just as in the *Morashá* of the Land of Israel we all

have a unique portion, so too in the *Morashá* of Torah. And just as according to the Sforno some settled in a small area of great value, so too in life; some people have what appears to be a small role but without doubt it is of great value. When I see a person dedicated to a spouse with a disability without great fanfare, media attention or elaborate ceremony, they are living a *Morashá* of great value.

As Torah Jews, we need to be reminded that our lot of land and our lot in life were tailored for us by the greatest tailor. When we deal with it the way we are supposed to, with faith and commitment, we are living a Torah life we should be proud of. May we all merit to cherish our *Morashá*.

21 Days of Healing

Rabbi Yehuda Oppenheimer • The Marlee Shul

The Kozhnutzer Maggid (1737–1814) in Sefer Avodas Yisroel comments that the twenty-one days and twenty-one nights in the three-week period that commences with shiva assar b'tamuz and concludes with tisha b'av correspond to the forty-two journeys that the Jewish people traveled while in the desert. These journeys are mentioned in Parshas Masei, which is always read during these weeks. He explains that "One needs to pass through this period with numerous journeys, to strengthen himself and purify his heart to serve Hashem with torah study, prayer and joy".

While the explanation provided seems somewhat terse, I would like to shed some light on this thought, based on an idea quoted by the author of Degel Machanei Ephraim (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Ephraim of Sudilkov,

1748–1810) in the name of his grandfather, the Baal Shem Tov.

The lifecycle of every Jew is analogous to the travels that the Jewish people journeyed from Mitzrayim until entering Eretz Yisroel. The day that he is born and exits his mother's womb is akin to the exodus from Egypt. He then passes through the wilderness of olam hazeh, during which time he endures the very same travails that our forefathers did while travelling in the desert. Finally, upon his death, he merits entering into the world of neshamos, the eretz hachaim, which is comparable to bias haaretz, the Jewish people's entry into Eretz Yisroel.

Taking this idea one step further, it follows that at the time of the churban, the destruction of the bais hamikdash, the aforementioned process was reversed and undone. Instead of leaving galus and coming to Eretz

Yisroel, our sins caused us to go in the opposite direction.

Perhaps the Kozhnutzer Maggid is telling us that every year, during these twenty-one days, we are given an opportunity both as a nation and as individuals to undo this damage. While we tend to think of this period as a time for unproductive mourning, in truth it should resemble our forefathers' desert experience, where the suffering was accompanied by great spiritual progress. Just as the forty-two travels endured by them in the midbar earned them entry into Eretz Yisroel, our efforts to emulate their growth will accomplish the same. In this merit, tisha b'av, which comes immediately after these forty-two time periods, will be the day that corresponds with our reentry into Eretz Yisroel, with the building of the bayis shlishi (the third temple) speedily in our days, Amen!

Chas v'Shalom Shoes

Rabbi Zev Spitz • Clanton Park Synagogue

Every year, we spend three full weeks, from Shiva Asar B'Tamuz until Tisha B'Av, mourning over the destruction of our two Batei Mikdash and the resulting exile in which we still find ourselves. What, though, are we really mourning? Simply put: The Beis Hamikdash is the place where we most intensely feel a passionate and intimate relationship with Hashem; it is the place where we experience the highest levels of holiness and sanctity. And without it, there will always be a small piece missing from Am Yisrael's unique bond with Hashem.

While there are many ways and actions in which we can bring about its rebuilding, the Gemara in Shabbos (31a) clearly tells us that there is one "simple" step that comes before all others. Amongst the numerous questions that a person will be asked after departing from this world is: Did you await the salvation and the rebuilding of the Temple?

Dreaming of the Beis Hamikdash. Yearning for its return. Not only in thought, but in action. *That* is the first step to our ultimate redemption.

An older man who looked quite poor entered a shoe store. It was a few days before Tisha B'Av. He asked for the fanciest shoes available. The request seemed incongruous, both because of its timing and his financial state. After being shown the most expensive shoes in the store, he made an even more unusual request. "Now, can I please have a pair of chas v'shalom shoes. Ones that are not leather."

After bringing out the second pair of shoes, the shoe salesman asked the poor man for an explanation. He said as follows: "In just a few days, Mashiach will hopefully come. The Beis Hamikdash will be rebuilt and Tisha B'Av will be transformed into our greatest holiday. Of course, I need the nicest and fanciest shoes to welcome the Melech HaMashiach.

Unfortunately, though, there is a possibility that he will not come. And so, I also need a pair of chas v'shalom shoes just in case I need to commemorate Tisha B'Av one last time."

That is a Jew who you awaits the salvation and the rebuilding of the Temple. Who dreams of the Beis Hamikdash and yearns for its return. Not only in thought, but in action. May we merit to follow in his footsteps as we take the first steps to our ultimate redemption.

Pinchas: The Religious Value of Friendship

Rabbi Chaim Strauchler • Shaarei Shomayim Congregation

"That which is hateful unto you do not do to your friend; this is the whole of the Torah, the rest is commentary; go forth and study" (Shabbat 31a).

Hillel responded with these words to a gentile who asked him to teach the whole Torah while standing on one foot (or with a single principle). On the surface, Hillel's famous reply covers only actions between a person and his or her neighbour, but not commandments between a person and G-d. Rashi closes this gap by expanding the scope of the word friend. "Do not do that which is hateful to your friend: 'Do not forsake your friend or your father's friend (Proverbs 27:10) – this refers to the Holy Blessed One. Do not disobey His commandments, for it is hateful unto you when a friend disobeys yours."

Hillel asks us to imagine what it feels like to be G-d – and to give orders that are ignored. Pinchas in our Torah portion fulfills this injunction like no other person in Tanach

(and is acknowledged as such): "Say, therefore, 'I grant him My pact of friendship...'" G-d thanks Pinchas for his actions on G-d's behalf with a covenant that codifies not just Pinchas' righteousness but also a bond of friendship.

In digesting the radical idea that humans are capable of being G-d's friends, we appreciate our potential to affect G-d's presence in this world, parallel to the experience of Pinchas. (We express this capability in the concept of *kiddush hashem* and *chillul hashem*.) At the same time, the Torah shows us that so much depends on learning to be a good friend. The facility to leave one's own perspective and enter into the heart of another – to experience solidarity with another's tribulations – to truly care about another self, constitute the Torah's essence.

As Toronto Torah celebrates its 500th publication this weekend, it's worthwhile to focus on this aspect of Torah life. In the

12th century, Yehuda Ibn-Tibbon famously wrote in a letter to his son: "Sim sefarekha haverekha – Make your books your friends; let your cases and shelves be your pleasure grounds and gardens." As friends of Toronto Torah, we say Yashar Koach, and we experience joy on its behalf for this milestone. While "Parsha Sheets" are just ink on paper – they embody something of the people who write and distribute them and their friendship. In sharing Torah, we connect with our common legacy and through that bond with one another. May this bond only grow stronger in the future – may it be an eternal pact of friendship.

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