



Parashat Pinhas



English version

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EGO ON HOLD

Leaders never became leaders by concentrating on their ego. They served the people in some way and became leaders incidentally, somewhere along the process. It is amazing how far we could go in life if we would just put our egos on hold and focus on our goals without involving our self-perspective in it. This is something we can learn from the “Woe” of the Elders.

ונתתה מהודך עליו - ולא כל הודך, זקנים שבאותו הדור אמרו:
 פני משה כפני חמה, פני יהושע כפני לבנה, אוי לה לאותה
 And you (Moshe) shall give of your shine to him (Yehoshua), and not all of your shine... The Elders of that generation said, that the face of Moshe shone like the sun, while the face of Yehoshua shone like the moon. Woe to this embarrassment! Woe to this shame!

This needs an explanation. What was it that caused the Elders such great embarrassment? And what was so bad about having Yehoshua lead them? What did Yehoshua do that was so embarrassing?

The Chida explains. The Midrash tells us that Yehoshua merited being a leader after Moshe, since he was Moshe's assistant; he would arrange the benches in the study hall for people to sit and learn comfortably. (Rabba Naso 6, 5) The Elders had been embarrassed to do what Yehoshua did; but now, they saw that it was specifically in this merit that Yehoshua became the leader of the Jews. 'Woe to this embarrassment. Woe to this shame'

that we were embarrassed to arrange the benches in the study hall. *The embarrassment that we felt then has caused us, the elders, to be students of the young Yehoshua.*

Imagine how far in life we could get if we were willing to subject ourselves to shame for doing the right thing. If we would be willing to admit our mistakes. If we would not be afraid of getting a "no". If we would not be afraid to give a no. If we would be able to accept the fact that we came from nothing, and everything we have is a gift from G-d.

Almost 150 years ago, there lived in Vilna a shoemaker named Zelig. Zelig was a nice guy, and a guy who barely made ends meet. One sunny day, Zelig got an inheritance that turned him, in no time, into a very rich fellow. Zelig then became R Zelig, and an important personality in town. When Zelig's son married the Rabbi's daughter, it put Zelig in a new light of respect in the eyes of all the townspeople.

Mr. Bitter could not watch the honor, respect and dignity R' Zelig was now receiving at the wedding. R Zelig, the former shoemaker!? How did this simple shoemaker “get ahead”? Mr. Bitter came over to Zelig at his son's wedding, when Zelig was surrounded by all the respectable people in town wishing him Mazal Tov. Mr. Bitter raised his shoe over the heads of the crowd and asked Zelig, above all the voices of the well-wishers, “Is it worth it for



me to fix this shoe? How much would it cost to fix?”

Zelig took this insult, this embarrassment, too hard; he turned as white as a ghost. He fainted on the spot. The doctors came to help, but it was too late. Zelig was dead. The wedding was over.

This story went viral. It reached the ears of R' Yisrael Salanter, who had no rest from the tragic outcome of this despicable behavior. He decided to open the Mussar movement. He wanted people to improve their character, so that this would not happen again.

What?! Because of one rare story, of some wicked Mr. Bitter, we need to initiate a Mussar Movement for all of Klal Yisrael?! Normal people do not act this way!! Why, because of just one bitter person, does everything need to change?

The answer is that the Mussar Movement was not created for the one-in-a-million Mr. Bitter. It was created for all the Zelig's out there. “Zelig. You have money. You have honor. You merited having your son marry the Rabbi's daughter! Everything is so good for you! Be happy with what you have! Why do you get so shaken up because of what people say to you or about you?!? Why would you faint - or die - from some silly comment?!?”

No. Not for Mr. Bitter. But for all the Zelig's out there who take an insult too much to heart, who

don't know how to deal with embarrassment, who take embarrassment in this world too seriously, while they make light of the embarrassment one might have in the World to Come. R Yisrael Salanter started the Mussar movement for people like you and me, who care too much about what people think about us.

Embarrassment is a tricky Middah. One of the signs of the Jewish people is to be shy, embarrassed.(Yevamot 79a) From the Talmud (ibid.) it is clear that Fear of G-d is really just embarrassment from G-d (also see Rambam Moreh Nevuchim, brought in the first Rama Orach HaChaim). G-d has given us so much; how can we not feel embarrassed? After all, we are recipients of things that we have not earned. But all this is the good, positive type of embarrassment. The bad embarrassment is to be embarrassed because of what people think about us, when we are actually doing the right thing. A person needs to know how to manage embarrassment. Embarrassment was created so that people would not be takers. For people to be appreciative.

Many times in life, you need to pick - Either be embarrassed in this world, or be embarrassed in the next World. We pray not to be embarrassed in this World, but more importantly, not to be embarrassed in the Next World, ולא נבוש לעולם ועד.

RELIGION OR RELATIONSHIP?

Many rabbis are of the opinion that Eliyahu Hanavi was originally Pinchas. The Baal Haturim points to the words in the beginning of this week's Parasha, **וְלָכֵן אֶעֱמָד הַנְּבִי נִתְּנָה לּוֹ אֶת־בְּרִיתִי שְׁלֹמֹם** and makes note of the small letter Vav in the word **שְׁלֹמֹם**. The Vav is mentioned in a Midrash cited by Rashi in Parashat Behukotay, **ה' פעמים מצינו יעקב מלא וא"ו ואליהו חסר וא"ו, מפני שנטל יעקב משכון מאליהו שיבא ויבשר הגאולה לבניו. Yaakov is spelled five times in Tanach with a**

*Vav. Eliyahu's name is spelled five times without a Vav. Yaakov "took" the letter Vav from Eliyahu's name as collateral, pledging that Eliyahu would announce the Final Redemption to his children. (26; 42)The Baal Haturim explains that the small letter Vav of **שְׁלֹמֹם** hints at this "Vav collateral".*

Someone once asked R' Chaim Soleveitchik about a seeming contradiction. We know that Eliyhau

Hanavi needs to come a day before Mashiach to announce tomorrow's good news, because the passuk in Malachi says: הַגָּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא הֵבִיא לְפָנָי בּוֹא יוֹם ה' הַגָּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא *I am sending you Elijah the prophet before the Great and Awesome Day of G-d.* (3:23) On the other hand, we find a contradictory belief. One of the Thirteen Principles of the Rambam, recited each day is, אָנִי מֵאֲמִין בְּאֵמוּנָה שְׁלֵמָה בְּבִיאַת הַמְּשִׁיחַ וְאֵפ"פ שִׁיתְמַהֲמָה עִם כָּל זֶה אַחֲכָה לוֹ בְּכָל יוֹם שִׁבְעָ. It is not enough for a person to believe that Mashiach is going to come. The Principle is that Mashiach can come *any day*. So the question is, how can I believe that Mashiach can come *today*, if Eliyahu Hanavi did not come yesterday?!? The answer R' Chaim gave is "תיקר". The acronym used in the Talmud when the answer is unknown: Eliyahu (HaTishbi) will answer the questions and queries, when Mashiach comes.

There is a different answer though. הַקָּטָן יִהְיֶה לְאֶלֶף. וְהַצָּעִיר לְגוֹי עָצוּם אֲנִי ה' בְּעֵתָהּ אֲחִישְׁנָה *The smallest will become a thousand times greater, and the youth will become a mighty nation; I am G-d. In its time, I will hasten it* (Yeshaya 60; 22). The Talmud teaches us that G-d will bring Mashiach in the appointed time, only if the Jews did not merit bringing Mashiach earlier. There is a deadline by which Mashiach has to come. And there is the possibility of bringing him through our merit, even before that deadline (Sanhedrin 98a). With this in mind, we can explain that Eliyahu will announce good tidings *only the day before the deadline*. But if Mashiach comes quickly, he won't need to wait for Eliyahu's announcement. פְּלִיטֵי סִי ק"י בְּסוֹף. This is what the song we sing on Saturday night after Havdallah says, במהרה יבא אלינו, עם משיח בן דוד, that we want Eliyahu Hanavi to come quickly to us, *together* with Mashiach. Because when Mashiach comes quickly, Eliyahu Hanavi comes *with* Mashiach. Not before him. (See Rambam Melachim 12; 2)

This explains why Yaakov needed to take a collateral from Eliyahu, the letter Vav, to assure that Eliyahu would bring the good tidings of Mashiach. Eliyahu will come the day before Mashiach, only if Mashiach arrives at the deadline,

without the Jews having deserved it. Yaakov was worried about Eliyahu's zealotness: if Yaakov's children would be undeserving, maybe Eliyahu wouldn't be interested in having Mashiach come to redeem them. This beautiful concept can be found in Mishneh Sachir, רבי יששכר שלמה ב"ר יצחק טייכטל, killed in Aushwitz, (ה"ד)

We know that Eliyahu is Pinchas because they were both zealots. Pinchas was zealous in killing Zimri, and Eliyahu was a zealous prophet. When G-d came to visit Pinchas, he found him in a cave in the desert and asked him what he was doing there. *And he said, I avenged Hashem, the G-d of Legions, for the Jews have left Your Brit (Milah), and they broke Your Altars, and they killed Your prophets with a sword, and I alone remain, and they want to take my life.* (Melachim I, 19, 14). Because of these zealous statements, G-d told Eliyahu to give his title of prophet to his student, Elisha. G-d did not approve of zealotness that complained that the Jewish people did not observe brit milah. (לעולם אתה מקנא?) As rectification, Eliyahu has to come to every milah. (PDRE 29)

What was wrong with Eliyahu's zealotness when he was a prophet in the cave? Why was this any different from Eliyahu's zealotness when he was Pinchas? Why did Pinchas get rewarded and Eliyahu get punished?

Because zealotness for G-d is only respected when it brings peace between G-d and His Children, not when it is just to point out transgressions. *Pinchas held back My wrath from the Jewish people, when he acted out of his zealotness amongst them, and I did not destroy B'nei Yisrael in My zealotness.* The reason why Pinchas was rewarded greatly was not for his being zealous, but for his saving the Jewish people. For bringing the Kapparah, וַיִּכַּפֵּר עַל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, and saving their relationship with G-d. This is very different from the zealotness of Eliyahu, which did not bring any peace between G-d and His People. For this mistake, Eliyahu was asked to pass on the job of being Prophet. And Yaakov, the Father of the Tribes, was worried that Eliyahu might make a mistake about the Final Redemption.

Although we may not be deserving of Mashiach at the End of Days, G-d may find a way for us, His children, to renew the depth and warmth of our relationship, even if we are not deserving of it.

A big mistake has crept into “the systems” we live in. Many parents and teachers act according to the idea that we have to perform a “list” of 613 mitzvot, and that they have to perceive the wrongdoings of their children or students as “transgressions”. There is an attempt to push conformity - to encourage a kind of "clubhouse" Judaism.

But guiding children is a serious matter. Torah is a guide for creating a *relationship* with G-d; it is not a soulless list of *rules*. If it bothers you that your child is transgressing one of the 613, but it does not bother you that there is a lack of warmth and love in the relationship between G-d and His Child, your efforts to make an improvement will not be

effective. If Eliyahu’s comment did not bring peace between G-d and His Children, there was no point in making it. Putting your foot down, without the intention of improving the relationship, is unacceptable to G-d. If your zealotry for G-d is expressed by finding fault with His children, you are being an ineffective messenger. This is obvious from the allegories mentioned frequently throughout Nach. To G-d, religion and transgressing it is a relationship issue, not a list of rules that may or may not be kept.

If only we can relate to our religion as a relationship, not merely as guidelines and regulations, then we will enjoy our religion much, much more. Tefillin. Shabbat. Tzniut. Learning Torah. Watching out eyes. Raising our children. We can perceive these as to-dos and not to-dos. Or we can perceive these as guidelines for our relationship. Then, our children will recognize the beauty of the religion, and appreciate it.

Exciting news...

I am starting a summer podcasts series for women. These podcasts will be similar to the Women's Chabura classes but in an extremely condensed version. I will present the problem at hand, the Torah Wisdom, and the "Selfie Steps", the concrete tools that will allow you to transform your lives. Sign up via email and you will receive the link to download these podcasts, so that you can listen at your own leisure. I hope these 15 minute bursts of Torah Growth will help you reach your personal summer goals.

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