

Our *Parashah* begins with *Hashem* announcing Pinchas' reward for his act of self-sacrifice, risking his life for the Jewish People at the end of last week's *Parashah*. The Torah says (25:12-13), "Therefore, say, 'Behold! I give him My covenant of peace. And it shall be for him and his offspring after him a covenant of eternal priesthood, because he took vengeance for his *Elokim*, and he atoned for *Bnei Yisrael*.'" Until now, Pinchas was not a *Kohen*. (Despite being a grandson of Aharon, Pinchas was not a *Kohen* because he was born before Aharon was made a *Kohen*.) Now Pinchas, too, became a *Kohen*.

R' Chaim Zaichyk z"l (1906-1989; *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivat Bet Yosef-Novardok in Buchach, Poland; later in Israel) writes: Once a person fulfills the mission for which he was put in this world, he has no reason to live any longer. Without a doubt, Pinchas' heroic act was the pinnacle of his existence and, presumably, the reason for which he was born. Therefore, he should have died now. However, when a person shows unusual dedication to serving *Hashem*, *Hashem* will give him a new mission when he completes his original one. That is what happened here; Pinchas was given a new mission, "a covenant of eternal priesthood."

We read in *Melachim I* (19:4) that Eliyahu Ha'Navi asked *Hashem* to take his life. R' Meir Leibush Weiser z"l (1809-1879; known as "*Malbim*") explains that Eliyahu felt he had perfected himself as much as he was expected to; therefore, he had no further reason to live. Instead, however, R' Zaichyk writes, *Hashem* gave Eliyahu a new mission--to live forever and attend every future *Brit Milah*. (Notably, there is a *Midrash* saying that Pinchas and Eliyahu are the same person.)

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Introductions

The earliest (known) work offering a systematic presentation of Jewish beliefs is "*Ha'nivchar Ba'emunot V'de'ot*" / "*The Choicest of the Beliefs and Understandings*," better known simply as "*Ha'emunot V'de'ot*," by R' Saadiah Gaon z"l (882-942; Egypt, Eretz Yisrael and present-day Iraq). He writes:

I introduce the work that I intend to write by publicizing the causes that lead people to miss the mark [of having correct beliefs], and how to eliminate those causes so that people reach the goal . . .

Mistakes occur in intellectual pursuits for one of two reasons. One is that the person pursuing the intellectual matter does not know how to recognize a logical proof. Therefore, he thinks that that which is a proof is not a proof, or he thinks that that which is not a proof is a proof. The second is that a person may know how to argue logically, but he applies his skills only half-heartedly or lackadaisically. Such a person jumps to conclusions without working through the matter under consideration. It goes without saying that incorrect results will be reached if a person has both traits: he does not know how to investigate properly and he does so only half way. . .

A third situation arises when a person does not know what he is seeking. In such a case, he is very far away from the goal, for even if he would chance upon the goal, he would not recognize it. Imagine, for example, a person who does not know how to use a scale, does not know what a scale looks like, and does not know how much silver is owed to him. Even if the person with whom he has a dispute would pay everything that he owes, there is no way that the first person would know . . .

What led me to write this work is that I see many people in these situations regarding their beliefs and knowledge. Some have reached the truth, they know it, and they are happy . . . Some have reached the truth, but they are uncertain about it, so they do not hold on to it firmly . . . Others have accepted falsehood believing it to be true . . . Others have followed a certain viewpoint, and then rejected it because of a contradiction. They then move on to try another viewpoint, only to reject that one as well . . .

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“Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Take to yourself Yehoshua bin Nun . . .’ (27:18)

Midrash Rabbah relates the verse (*Mishlei* 27:18), “He who guards the fig will eat its fruit” to our verse. [Until here from the *Midrash*]

The *Gemara* (*Bava Batra* 75a) relates: “The elders of that generation said, ‘Moshe’s face is like the face of the sun; Yehoshua’s face is like the face of the moon. Woe to us for that embarrassment! Woe to us for that shame!’” [Until here from the *Gemara*]

R’ Yitzchak of Valozhyn z”l (Belarus; died 1849) explains (in a footnote to the commentary on *Pirkei Avot* by his father, R’ Chaim of Valozhyn z”l) using a parable: A successful merchant came to a poor village and asked its inhabitants to come to work in his business. Most of the villagers said, “What do we know about such work?” but one person answered the merchant’s call. After a relatively short time, the merchant’s business prospered, and that one villager became wealthy in his own right.

One day, the merchant and his now-wealthy assistant visited the latter’s village. Seeing them, the villagers hid their faces in shame. They explained, “We are not ashamed in the merchant’s presence, for his wealth is a gift from G-d, given to him and not to us. But, we are embarrassed in our fellow villager’s presence, for each of us could have accomplished what he accomplished if only we had answered the call.”

Similarly, continues R’ Yitzchak, the elders of *Yisrael* were not embarrassed at not being as great as Moshe Rabbeinu, for his status is unique and unparalleled in history. Moshe is the “sun,” which receives its light directly from *Hashem*. In contrast, Yehoshua is the “moon,” whose light is but reflected light from the sun, from Moshe. Any of the elders could have achieved what Yehoshua achieved had they only done what he did. Specifically, the Torah says (*Shmot* 33:11), “His [Moshe’s] servant, Yehoshua bin Nun, a lad, would not depart from within the tent.” It was to the reward for this dedication that the *Midrash* refers to when it cites the verse, “He who guards the fig will eat its fruit.” (*Ruach Chaim* 1:1)

Elsewhere in the Torah . . .

“Rabbi Elazar said that Rabbi Chaninah said, ‘Torah scholars increase peace in the world.’” (*Nazir* 66b)

R’ Yaakov Yosef z”l (1840-1902; *Rosh Yeshiva*, rabbi, and *Maggid* / preacher in Lithuania; first and only Chief Rabbi of New York City) remarked, with a touch of humor, about the irony that the *Talmud* is full of disagreements: The *Halachah* is clear that, if a *Kohen* is present at a meal, he should lead *Birkat Ha’mazon*. However, if no *Kohen* is present, the participants in the meal might argue over who should “*Bentch*.” Our Sages resolved this, noted R’ Yosef, by disagreeing over another point--who is greater, one who recites a blessing or one who recites “*Amen*”? Since our Sages left this disagreement unresolved, the result will be peace between the participants in the meal. The one who gets to lead *Birkat Ha’mazon* can tell himself that reciting the blessing is greater than reciting *Amen*, while the others can tell themselves that reciting *Amen* is greater. Thus, our Sages’ disagreements themselves brings about peace.

(*L’Bet Yaakov*)

“Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aharon the *Kohen*, turned back My wrath from upon *Bnei Yisrael*, when he zealously avenged Me among them, so I did not consume *Bnei Yisrael* in My vengeance.” (25:11)

Rashi z”l writes: Because the tribes spoke disparagingly of Pinchas saying, “Look at this grandson of Puti (another name for Yitro, Pinchas’ maternal grandfather)! Puti used to fatten calves for idolatrous sacrifices, yet his grandson (Pinchas) has dared to slay a prince of one of Israel’s tribes!” Therefore, the Torah connects Pinchas genealogically with Aharon. [Until here from *Rashi*]

R’ Eliyahu Noach Halperin z”l *Hy”d* (1886-1943; rabbi of Orla Podlaskie, Poland) asks: On the one hand, Pinchas was a *Tzaddik*, and he saved *Bnei Yisrael* from destruction. Why, then, were *Bnei Yisrael* disparaging him, and why is it relevant that he was a grandson of an idolator? On the other hand, what difference does it make that he was Aharon’s grandson? That doesn’t change the fact that his other grandfather was an idolator! Also, why was Pinchas’ deed deserving of such a unique reward--*Hashem*’s “Covenant of Peace” (verse 12)?

R’ Halperin explains: Aharon is known as the quintessential “Lover of Peace and Pursuer of Peace” (*Avot* ch.1). Surely, thought *Bnei Yisrael*, Aharon passed these traits on to his children and grandchildren! How, then, was Pinchas capable of killing two people, Zimri and Kozbi, one of whom was a Prince of a tribe of *Yisrael*?! Indeed, even if he were not Aharon’s grandson, where was Pinchas’ love for his co-religionist, a basic human trait? Obviously, reasoned *Bnei Yisrael*, Pinchas’ nature was influenced negatively by his other grandfather, a priest to idolatry.

No! says the Torah. Pinchas was a grandson of Aharon, and he inherited a loving and merciful nature from his grandfather Aharon. Indeed, that is what makes his action so remarkable and so deserving of the unique reward that he received. Because of Pinchas’ immense love for the Jewish People, he rose to the occasion and overpowered his own nature in order to save the Jewish People.

[R’ Halperin’s descendant, R’ Chaim Dov Stark *shlita*, writes that this is the only known surviving Torah thought of R’ Halperin, who was killed in the Holocaust.] (Quoted in *Ha’keter Ve’ha’kavod*)

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R’ Zaichyk continues: The *Chassidic Rebbe*, R’ Yisrael of Kozhnitz z”l (1737-1814) was a very sickly person. When asked how he nevertheless lived to an old age, he replied: “Life ends when a person finishes his mission in this world. As for me, whenever I felt I had completed my mission, I immediately accepted new tasks and new goals on myself. Therefore, I could not be taken from this world.” (*Ohr Chadash*)