

# SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

PINHAS

Haftarah: Yirmiyahu 1:1-2:3

JULY 29-30, 2016 24 TAMUZ 5776

Rosh Hodesh Ab will be celebrated on Friday, August 5.

**DEDICATIONS: In memory of Victoria Bat Rosa – 1 AB – Victoria Gindi**

**In memory of Reuben Ben Farha – 23 Tamuz – Reuben J Bibi**

To subscribe or to unsubscribe, please reply to  
[ShabbatShalomNewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:ShabbatShalomNewsletter@gmail.com)  
 Newsletter archives now at [BenaiAsher.Org](http://BenaiAsher.Org)

Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue, 17th Floor,  
 Artistic Frame at 4:00PM – Please join us! 212-289-2100 –  
 Mincha– The most important tefilah of the day –Give us 11  
 minutes and we'll give you the World To Come!

## Editors Notes

### **Do we worship Pe'or? Believe it or not, the bulk of our society does and may not even know it!**

Over the last week in our classes we have been trying to understand the worship of Pe'or mentioned towards the end of last week's portion of Balak and then again at the beginning of this week's portion of Pinchas.

What was the worship of Pe'or? The rabbis explain that as part of the service to Pe'or, the worshipper would defecate in their god's honor and place their waste in front of the idol as an offering. At first glance, this practice seems bizarre and makes no sense. I recall when we first heard the story as children, the absurdity of the worship was seen as an excuse to allow it. Let me explain.

After failing to curse the Jewish people, Bilaam, the gentile prophet gives Balak some advice. Based on the instructions of Bilaam, the people of Moab set up a market with vendors selling beautiful cloth and material. When the men come to view the merchandise, they are directed by old women to the back rooms where the better goods can be seen and touched. There, they are met by the most attractive Moabite girls who offer to model the clothing. But first they beg their client to relax on the sofa and enjoy some special wine. Secluded with the beautiful young women modeling their merchandise and affected by the wine, the men are stirred to succumb to temptation. As a pre-condition to any amorous activity, the girls demand that the men first worship their gods. The men refuse at first, but after learning that to worship means to defecate on the idol; they laugh and ask themselves, "why not"? They justify their actions thinking this can't be any sin. In fact they convince themselves that this must be a misvah; a good deed enacted in showing their disdain and

contempt for the idol. The men comply and this leads to the true depravity of immorality.

To us, there was no sin of idolatry. But we were very wrong. There was a sin of the worst kind and that sin merged and was one with the second sin of immorality.

Today we might think that if we spit on an idol, we are doing good. So where did our forefather's go wrong? And as to the Moabites, one could easily ask if this was idolatry, what were they thinking? This is divine worship? This is how they pay homage to what they believe to be god?

We can certainly rationalize astrological based worship of the sun, the moon, the stars and other heavenly bodies. Believing that these bodies had influence and controlled people's lives, one could understand how they took on the status of deities. Even today people are bound to their belief in the power of the stars. The most common instances of this are sun gods and moon gods in polytheistic systems worldwide. And all of us are aware of the association of the planets with deities in Babylonian, and Greco-Roman religion.

Beyond celestial gods, we know in the earliest of times, people worshipped angels thinking they could be intermediaries who could be influenced.

The tanach speaks of Dagon, god of the Philistines. Dagon's image represented the combination of both man and fish. The name "Dagon" is derived from "dag" which means "fish." As a seafaring nation, the original Philistines had much to fear and be thankful of with regard to the sea. In addition, the symbol of a fish in human form was really meant to represent fertility and the vivifying powers of nature and reproduction.

In a similar vein, the Canaanites worshiped Baal as the sun god and as the storm god—he is usually depicted holding a lightning bolt—who defeated enemies and produced crops. They also worshiped him as a fertility god who provided children. We see how popular the worship of Baal was in the time of Eliyahu HaNavi even by the Israelites. A god who will take care of me!

To our contemporary sensibilities it seems bizarre enough that societies once used to seriously bow to and pray to an idol, a lifeless block of stone, but we can fathom their reasoning. With regard to Pe'or though, how could anyone seriously believe that they are serving some sacred purpose by relieving themselves in front of their god?

Yet Pe'or must have had some incredible attraction and represented the highest level of danger to the Jewish people. Twenty four thousand men died because of Pe'or. A prince of the people rebels because of Pe'or. As this week's portion begins, Hashem is telling Moses that Pinchas has turned away G-d's anger by avenging Him and because of Pinchas' actions, the children of Israel were saved. He promises Pinchas, "G-d's eternal covenant of Peace" and certifies Pinchas' status as a Kohen. G-d continues and commands Moses to destroy the Midianites. All of this, because of the incident of Pe'or.

In fact the menace of Pe'or or perhaps our vulnerability to Pe'or must have been so momentous that Hashem himself chose to bury Moses opposite Pe'or .

What was Pe'or really all about?

Pe'or is based on a Pe'or culture which is the antithesis of the Torah Moses gave us. Pe'or is based on deifying that which comes naturally. If my body wants to defecate, that's beautiful. If my body feels the need to sleep with that woman although she is someone else's wife, then I must heed my body. If my body desires someone of the same gender or even an animal, then it must be acceptable. If I hunger for anything, then I must feed that hunger. If today I feel like a man, I am a man and if tomorrow I feel like a woman, I am a woman. The key to Pe'or is shedding any and every aspect of self-control. It is freedom from responsibility. It is the pursuit of every type of sensual self-indulgence and sensual pleasure as an end in itself. Its apex is in the serving of one's basest inclinations.

Rabbi Abittan would teach that the purpose of the Torah is to take us from slavery to freedom and the highest level of freedom is when one can exercise complete self-control while living in the real world. One is free when one is no longer a slave and there is no master as powerful as our inclination. Moses, the messenger through whom Hashem gave the Torah, taught us that G-dliness can and must permeate through all of reality; it must even dictate our approach to physical pleasures.

The danger of Pe'or is real. We live in a Pe'or society. We live in a world of excuses and

justifications. We live in a world where we are told to be who we want to be. We live in a world where almost anything goes. We live in a world where we are told not to bridle our passions. We live in a world where we are told to applaud those who are free. But that's not freedom. That's slavery. And it's so dangerous that Moses himself is buried opposite Pe'or, perhaps to always remind us that we as Moses' people must remain opposite of what Pe'or stands for. Only through control, can we be truly free.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi David Bibi

### **A Sliver of Sunshine at the New York Times By Bernard Goldberg - Published July 26, 2016**

It turns out that conservative Republicans aren't the only ones who think the New York Times has a liberal bias.

Sure, the paper has a bunch of liberal columnists who rarely surprise us with their opinions. And the editorials in the Times are predictably progressive. But that's acceptable. Opinion writers, after all, are entitled to their opinions.

But now we have a column in the Times from its new public editor, the journalist who monitors the paper and listens to complaints from those who consume its news. Her name is Liz Spayd and if her latest offering is any indication, there is a sliver of sunshine peeking through the clouds at the most important newspaper in the entire solar system, as the journalists at the Times like to think of their paper.

Under the headline, "Why Readers See the Times as Liberal," Ms. Spayd shares with us a few observations that showed up in her inbox. There's an email from Gary in Manhattan who writes: "The NY Times is alienating its independent and open-minded readers, and in doing so, limiting the reach of their message and its possible influence."

Another (unnamed) reader from California says she believes journalists at the Times are trying to convince readers to think they way they do. "I never thought I'd see the day when I, as a liberal, would start getting so frustrated with the one-sided reporting that I would start hopping over to the Fox News webpage to read an article and get the rest of the story that the NYT refused to publish."

And one more, from James in Arizona: "You've lost a subscriber because of your relentless bias against Trump - and I'm not even a Republican."

When people who aren't Republicans think Donald Trump is getting a raw deal, it's time to take notice, which is exactly what Liz Spayd has done.

"You can imagine," she writes, "what the letters from actual conservatives sound like."

When she went around to journalists in the Times newsroom, asking what they thought of the bias claims, she got just what many of us would expect: "Mostly I was met with a roll of the eyes," she writes. "All sides hate us. We're tough on everyone. There's nothing new here."

I spent 28 years at CBS News and it's been my experience that journalists are not especially introspective. Their reaction to charges of bias — after the eye roll - is to circle the wagons. Bias, they will tell you, is in the eyes of the beholder. If you think we're biased than that proves just one thing: that you're the one who's biased.

Ms. Spayd is rightly skeptical. She says there are a few things the Times can do - "some small steps on a longer journey," as she puts it - to make the paper at least seem less biased and more fair.

For example, last December the Times ran an editorial calling for gun control. Fair enough — except they ran it on Page One.

How about "leaving editorials on the editorial page," she says. That might cut down on perceptions that the Times is relentlessly liberal. And she's right.

Then there's the "drumbeat" of campaign ads for Hillary Clinton campaign on the website. "Even for me," Ms. Spayd writes, "who fully knows an ad from a news story, seeing Clinton's smiling face when I've come to read the news can be rather jarring."

Here's an ideas, she says: What about banning campaign ads from the home page.

Another good idea.

Then there are the reader comments attached to political articles. The vast majority of those comments come from liberals. Conservative comments, she writes, "occupy just a few back-row seats in this giant liberal echo chamber." The problem, she says, isn't that they're screened out by editors, it's that they don't show up in the first place.

Maybe conservatives don't write to the Times because they figure they'd be wasting their time. I've

written several letters to the editor, all polite and civil, taking on the liberal bias of this article or that. They almost never see the light of day. So after a while what do you think happens? You stop writing.

The other day I shared with you a few letters the hard copy of the Times published on the day Donald Trump chose Governor Mike Pence as his running mate. One said Governor Pence "is not merely right wing; he's cruel and racist and uncaring. But then, isn't that what today's Republican Party is all about?" Another said Mike Pence "has the personality, the charisma and the star wattage of a rutabaga."

You expect this kind of trash on the Internet - not the New York Times. But the letters editor at the Times saw no problem in giving space to an angry liberal who thinks the entire Republican Party is "cruel and racist and uncaring." And when did childish name-calling become acceptable at the high-minded New York Times? Mike Pence "has the personality ... of a rutabaga." This kind of nonsense doesn't only make the letter writer look foolish. It makes the New York Times look foolish, too.

Let me submit to Liz Spayd, and anyone else at the Times who might care, that this is another reason that many of us - in the words of the headline - "see the Times as liberal."

This is how Ms. Spayd ends her column: "Imagine what would be missed by journalists who felt no pressing need to see the world through others' eyes. Imagine the stories they might miss, like the groundswell of isolation that propelled a candidate like Donald Trump to his party's nomination. Imagine a country where the greatest, most powerful newsroom in the free world was viewed not as a voice that speaks to all but as one that has taken sides.

"Or has that already happened?"

What the New York Times needs is a little more diversity than they have over there. Actually, a lot more. Maybe they should consider an idea that they've championed many times over the years: affirmative action.

But this time it would be affirmative action for conservative journalists, a tiny minority in the progressive New York Times newsroom. Think of it as some small steps on a longer journey

### Summary of the Perasha

- Pinchas' reward, Zelaphcad's daughters, korbanot for the holidays (year 40)
- 1- Hashem rewards Pinchas for killing Zimri. Hashem tells Moshe to count Benei Israel
- 2- Benei Israel is counted. The families and count for each tribe are listed.
- 3- Israel is divided between the tribes. The tribe of Levi is counted. The daughters of Zelphchad make a case that they should receive land too.
- 4- Zelaphchad's daughters get land. Moshe is shown the land of Israel and told he will not enter. Yehoshua is appointed as the new leader
- 5- Korbanot - The daily korban (korban tamid), Shabbat korbanot and Rosh Hodesh korbanot
- 6- Korbanot- The Pesach, Shavout, Rosh Hashana and Kipur korbanot. The issur of doing melacha on each holiday
- 7- Korbanot- The Succoth and Shemini Aseret korbanot. The issur of doing melacha on each holiday.

**FROM THE JERSEY SHORE NEWSLETTER**  
**“Therefore say: Behold I give him My covenant of peace.” (Bemidbar 25:2)**

Great is the blessing of peace, for without peace there is no blessing in life. Rabbi David Kaplan tells a story about Yoni. Yoni was in sixth grade and was very bright. He was at the top of his class. One day he came home with an uncharacteristically low mark on a test. Slowly his test scores continued to go down. The teacher called the parents asking if they had any idea what was underlying this sudden change. The two were clueless. Neither parent had seen any change in their son's behavior at home and several times had asked him about what was going on, but he just said that he was not able to concentrate that well. Eventually the principal advised to send him to an expert for an assessment in order to get to the bottom of this mystery.

Yoni met with the expert once and that evening the father got a call. “I found the problem and I'm glad to say it's an easy one to fix.” Yoni's father was so happy, “Wow, I'm really glad to hear that. What is it?” There was a slight hesitation on the other end of the line. “It's you, perhaps a little bit your wife too – but for the most part it's you.”

“Me?” “Uh, yes you. You see, he told me that there's been more yelling in the house than usual lately, and that you're using words and terms that really have no place in a religious home.” The father responded, “Well, I've been under a lot of stress lately and...”

“Sir, hear me out. I'm sure there is a logical explanation for what you did. However, to yell at one's wife is never excusable, and to resort to harsh insults is even worse. This has rattled Yoni so much that he can't concentrate, and his grades have bottomed out. I can tell you with certainty that if you start treating your wife better there will be a dramatic improvement in Yoni's performance.”

Happily, the man who told this story about himself reported that he got his act together and sure enough, Yoni's grades jumped up to where they had always been.

One cannot speak enough about how important Shalom Bayit is to a child's emotional well-being or how much of parents' success with their children depends on their getting along well and respecting each other. A few pointers:

1. Every spouse should ask him or herself, if I was a man or woman would I like to be married to me?
2. Keep in mind that hesed begins at home. If a person does hesed with people outside the home but doesn't treat one's spouse with kindness, all the hesed one does with others doesn't count.
3. Read a book on marriage mussar 10 or 20 minutes a day.
4. Check your attitude towards money. Money is a prominent cause of marital strife.
5. Always feel a sense of hakarat hatob (appreciation) to your spouse for what the spouse does for you.
6. Never interrupt your spouse while your spouse is speaking.
7. Take interest in your spouse's world.
8. Don't criticize your spouse ever again.
9. Buy your wife gifts periodically. Big ones too.
10. Admit you're wrong instead of trying to justify yourself like an adolescent.
11. Do all the above and enjoy Gan Eden in this world. - Rabbi Reuven Semah

**“Bilam saw Israel dwelling according to its tribes.” (Bemidbar 24:2)**

Our perashah talks about Bilam and his efforts to curse the Jewish nation. Despite his desire to curse, he was compelled to bless the nation. One such instance occurred when he saw the tents of Israel, and the way they were set up. Rashi says: “He saw that the entrances of their tents were not aligned opposite each other, so that one should not peer into the tent of his friend.” The pasuk quoted above continues and says, “And the spirit of G-d was upon him.” The powerful message here is that when a low character, like Bilam, saw the modest and pure ways of Israel, he became inspired. We shouldn't think that if we dress properly and don't look in the wrong place, that it is not picked up on by the gentiles. It is, and they become changed.

This is the one year anniversary of the Supreme Court ruling allowing and recognizing same gender marriages. Many of you might ask, why are we discussing this? Baruch Hashem, we are not contemplating doing this. Besides the legal aspects of discrimination in a situation when it conflicts with religion, it has a profound impact on us.

The Gemara says that there was once a great Rabbi known as Shemuel Hakatan. He was so great that he was worthy that Hashem's shechinah (Hashem's presence) should rest upon him, but his generation was not worthy to be able to see this. So we see that the generation we live in can cap our spiritual growth. What occurred a year ago with the Supreme Court and the follow up of many marriages has the power to limit our own growth.

What do we do about this? Do we just groan about it? Rabbi Avraham Ausband, shelit"ah, once told this true story. A woman was hired by a company in Riverdale. She dressed very modestly but she appeared somewhat different. They asked her about her past, and she said she is a religious Jewish convert. She used to live in Bayonne, NJ, and she used to dress inappropriately. Very inappropriately. Many times she would see the yeshivah students from the Yeshivah of Bayonne walking the streets. She was curious who they were, so she went over to them to ask directions (in her usual garb). They were very courteous and answered her, but they always looked down. She was amazed and looked into it, and she converted. This woman who lived on a low moral standard was inspired when she was confronted by modest and purity in the same way that Bilam was.

Rav Shach, zt"l, once said that the prayer of Alenu that we say at the end of our prayers says: "All the evil-doers of the Earth will recognize and know... that every knee will bow to you and that we will take oaths by Your Name." This means that in the last generation before Mashiah, all the evil-doers will be turned over. It's our job to turn them over to good. How can we? Our own actions inspire them to change. In that way, this generation we live in will not cap our growth. This generation of ours is both a challenge and an opportunity. Rabbi Reuven Semah

### **RABBI ELI MANSOUR** **Learning From Yocheved**

In Parashat Pinhas we read about the census that was taken shortly before Beneh Yisrael entered the Land of Israel. The Torah goes through all the tribes, listing the major families of each, and informs us of the tribe's population. In telling of the census of the tribe of Levi, the Torah, curiously, found it necessary to make a brief interruption to mention Yocheved, the mother of Moshe Rabbenu: "The name of Amram's

wife was Yocheved, the daughter of Levi who begot her for Levi in Egypt, and she begot for Amram Aharon and Moshe, and their sister, Miriam" (26:59).

That Yocheved was deemed worthy of special mention by the Torah in this context should indicate to us that she was a unique and exceptional woman. Indeed, the Sages teach that she lived an unusually long life, well over two hundred years. Moreover, she received more "Nahat" than any Jewish mother could ever imagine. She was the mother of Moshe Rabbenu, the greatest leader and prophet our nation has ever known, and of Aharon Ha'kohen, the righteous Sadik, Kohen Gadol, and progenitor of the eternal priestly tribe. And her daughter Miriam was a beloved and revered prophetess and teacher of the women of Beneh Yisrael.

What was the source of Yocheved's Zechut (merit)? Why was she worthy of living an exceptionally long life and seeing her three children emerge as outstanding Sadikim and leaders?

The source of her merit is told toward the beginning of the Book of Shemot, where we read of Pharaoh's decree that all newborn males among Beneh Yisrael must be put to death. Yocheved was one of the two primary midwives for Beneh Yisrael, and she courageously defied the royal edict and delivered the babies. She was rewarded "measure for measure" with long life and with three children who brought spiritual life to Beneh Yisrael. She had brought life to the newborn infants, and God therefore bestowed upon her the blessing of life.

Our generation has a lot to learn from Yocheved. She rescued Jewish children during the time of Egyptian bondage, a period of suffering and persecution. She brought life to these children – even though it was a life of hardship. Some people in her position might have chosen to comply with Pharaoh's edict, if for no other reason than to spare these children the life of slavery that awaited them. But Yocheved understood the central importance of bringing Jewish children into the world, without making calculations. She was rewarded for her commitment to our nation's growth despite the hardships to which they were subjected.

Today, unfortunately, many young couples find all kinds of reasons to delay having children, or to have only one or two children. More often than not, these are only excuses. Raising children is hard work, and so couples come up with reasons to spare themselves this "burden". Nobody's situation today is as difficult as Beneh Yisrael's condition during the Egyptian bondage. If Yocheved insisted on bringing

many children into the world during that period, then today's families can certainly manage to raise sizeable families.

For good reason, the command of "Peru U'rbu" (procreation) is the first Misva in the Torah. Simply put, without Jews, there is no Judaism. Begetting and raising children has always been Am Yisrael's highest priority, and it must continue to be our highest priority.

It must be emphasized that "Peru U'rbu" means not only having children, but also directing them toward a life of Torah commitment. The word "Rebu" has two meanings – multiplying, and directing. Yishmael, for example, was a "Robeh Kashat" – an archer (Bereshit 21:20). The term "Robeh" in this phrase means directing an arrow to a specific target. The obligation of "Rebu" similarly demands that we direct our children toward a "target," toward a life of religious commitment.

Let us learn from the great Sadeket, Yocheved, and commit ourselves to the continued growth – both in quantity of quality – of the Jewish nation, and may we then be worthy to see our children, too, grow to become outstanding Sadikim who illuminate the world with their piety and Torah scholarship.

**VICTOR BIBI  
SOD HAPARASHA**

**Will be distributed under a separate list  
If you want to receive this article every week,  
please let us know and we will add you to that list**

**Rabbi Wein**

The count of the Jewish people that appears in this week's Torah reading occurs after a long string of unpleasant incidents and tragedies in this final period of their sojourn in the Sinai desert. The simple understanding of this sequence of events and subsequent count of the people is that after so many had died in the desert; Moshe had to have an accurate number of the Jewish people before their entry into the Land of Israel.

But on deeper reflection, it is possible to see a more subtle message that is very relevant to our times and circumstances. It is easy, almost understandable, for people – nations and individuals – to lose heart after a series of reverses and tragedies occur. There arises a feeling of helplessness, frustration and eventual surrender to the unpleasant realities that surrounded them.... and continue to surround them. There is an inner human voice that always whispers:

"What is the use of going on and continuing to struggle, or even of living itself?"

Despondency reigns supreme in the human psyche. It is no accident that depression, unfortunately, is such a widespread clinical disease in the Western world today. For after all, life is complicated and laden with intractable problems and issues. We find it so much easier to memorialize the dead than to inspire and consecrate the living.

The Torah comes to concentrate once more on the numbers of the living; the generation that did not perish in the desert and would conquer and inherit its promised homeland, against all odds and many enemies. It is for that reason that Moshe counts the Jewish people now after all of the difficulties in the desert, in order to assert that the task is to concentrate on the future and not wallow in the misfortunes of the past.

The Jewish people, and in fact many nations of the world, invested greatly in memorializing the Holocaust and its victims. But even the recently departed great memorializer of the Holocaust, Elie Wiesel, told me in Miami Beach fifty years ago that the Holocaust and its memories, museums, literature and academic disciplines would be of value only if it helped build a stronger and more vital and committed Jewish people.

As important as memory is – and it certainly is very important – it alone would not guarantee Jewish survival in the future. After the Holocaust the task of the Jewish people in the Diaspora and in the nascent Jewish state of Israel was to somehow rebuild and revitalize itself; to disperse the clouds of pessimism which engulfed us and to infuse the Jewish people with a can-do spirit that would carry them forward.

We, like our ancestors in the desert, were reeling from the tragedy and destruction that surrounded us. Like they, we also wailed: "Is there no end to our dying?" But by counting on the will of the survivors of Israel – every one of whom counts and is counted – the mood changed and our future became brighter than ever imagined before. This is a profound lesson that the Torah teaches us in this week's parsha.

**Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks  
Moses' Disappointment**

Hidden beneath the surface of parshat Pinchas the sages uncovered a story of great poignancy. Moses, having seen his sister and brother die, knew that his own time on earth was coming to a close. He prayed to God to appoint a successor: "May the Lord, God of

the spirits of all mankind, appoint a man over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the Lord's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd."

There is, though, an obvious question. Why does this episode appear here? It should surely have been positioned seven chapters earlier, either at the point at which God told Moses and Aaron that they would die without entering the land, or shortly thereafter when we read of the death of Aaron.

The sages sensed two clues to the story beneath the story. The first is that it appears immediately after the episode in which the daughters of Tzelophehad sought and were granted their father's share in the land. It was this that triggered Moses' request. A Midrash explains:

What was Moses' reason for making this request after declaring the order of inheritance? Just this, that when the daughters of Tzelophehad inherited from their father, Moses reasoned: the time is right for me to make my own request. If daughters inherit, it is surely right that my sons should inherit my glory.

The second clue lies in God's words to Moses immediately before he made the request for the appointment of a successor:

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go up this mountain of Abarim and see the land I have given the Israelites. After you have seen it, you too will be gathered to your people, as your brother Aaron was . . ."

The italicised words are seemingly redundant. God was telling Moses he would soon die. Why did He need to add, "as your brother Aaron"? On this the Midrash says: this teaches us that Moses wanted to die the way Aaron did. The Ktav Sofer explains: Aaron had the privilege of knowing that his children would follow in his footsteps. Elazar, his son, was appointed as High Priest in his lifetime. To this day cohanim are direct descendants of Aaron. Moses likewise longed to see one of his sons, Gershom or Eliezer, take his place as leader of the people. It was not to be. That is the story beneath the story.

It had an aftermath. In the book of Judges we read of a man named Micah who established an idolatrous cult in the territory of Ephraim and hired a Levite to officiate in the shrine. Some men from the tribe of Dan, moving north to find more suitable land for themselves, came upon Micah's house and seized both the idolatrous artefacts and the Levite, whom

they persuaded to become their priest, saying, "Come with us, and be our father and priest. Isn't it better that you serve a tribe and clan in Israel as priest rather than just one man's household?"

Only at the end of the story are we told the name of the idolatrous priest: Jonathan son of Gershom son of Moses. In our texts the letter nun has been inserted into the last of these names, so that it can be read as Menasheh rather than Moses. However, the letter, unusually, is written above the line, as a superscription. The Talmud says that the nun was added to avoid besmirching the name of Moses himself, by disclosing that his grandson had become an idolatrous priest.

How are we to explain Moses' apparent failure with his own children and grandchildren? One suggestion made by the sages was that it had to do with the fact that for years he lived in Midian with his father in law Jethro who was at the time an idolatrous priest. Something of the Midianite influence re-appeared in Jonathan three generations later.

Alternatively there are hints here and there that Moses himself was so preoccupied with leading the people that he simply did not have time to attend to the spiritual needs of his children. For instance, when Jethro came to visit his son-in-law after the division of the Red Sea, he brought with him Moses' wife Tziporah and their two sons. They had not been with him until then.

The rabbis went further in speculating about the reason that Moses' own sister and brother Aaron and Miriam spoke negatively about him. What they were referring to, said the sages, is the fact that Moses had physically separated from his wife. He had done so because the nature of his role was such that he had to be in a state of purity the whole time because at any moment he might have to speak or be spoken to by God. They were, in short, complaining that he was neglecting his own family.

A third explanation has to do with the nature of leadership itself. Bureaucratic authority – authority in virtue of office – can be passed down from parent to child. Monarchy is like that. So is aristocracy. So are some forms of religious leadership, like the priesthood. But charismatic authority – in virtue of personal qualities – is never automatically handed on across the generations. Moses was a prophet, and prophecy depends almost entirely on personal qualities. That, incidentally, is why, though kingship and priesthood in Judaism were male prerogatives, prophecy was not. There were prophetesses as well as prophets. In this respect Moses was not unusual.

Few charismatic leaders have children who are also charismatic leaders.

A fourth explanation offered by the sages was quite different. On principle, God did not want the crown of Torah to pass from parent to child in dynastic succession. Kingship and priesthood did. But the crown of Torah, they said, belongs to anyone who chooses to take hold of it and bear its responsibilities. "Moses commanded us the Torah as an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob," meaning that it belongs to all of us, not just an elite. The Talmud elaborates:

Be careful [not to neglect] the children of the poor, because from them Torah goes forth ... Why is it not usual for scholars to give birth to sons who are scholars?

R. Joseph said: so that it should not be said that the Torah is their inheritance.

R. Shisha, son of R. Idi said: so that they should not be arrogant towards the community.

Mar Zutra said: because they act highhandedly against the community.

R. Ashi said: because they call people asses.

Rabina said: because they do not first utter a blessing over the Torah.

In other words, the "crown of Torah" was deliberately not hereditary because it might become the prerogative of the rich. Or because children of great scholars might take their inheritance for granted. Or because it could lead to arrogance and contempt for others. Or because learning itself might become a mere intellectual pursuit rather than a spiritual exercise ("they do not first utter a blessing over the Torah").

However, there is a fifth factor worthy of consideration. Some of the greatest figures in Jewish history did not succeed with all their children. Abraham fathered Ishmael. Isaac and Rebecca gave birth to Esau. All twelve of Jacob's children stayed within the fold, but three of them – Reuben, Shimon and Levi – disappointed their father. Of Shimon and Levi he said, "Let my soul not enter their plot; let my spirit not unite with their meeting" (Gen. 49:6). On the face of it, he was dissociating himself from them.[1] Nonetheless, the three great leaders of the Israelites throughout the exodus – Moses, Aaron and Miriam – were all children of Levi.

Solomon gave birth to Rehoboam, whose disastrous leadership divided the kingdom. Hezekiah, one of Judah's greatest kings, was the father of Menasheh, one of the worst. Not all parents succeed with all their

children all the time. How could it be otherwise? We each possess freedom. We are each, to some extent, who we chose to become. Neither genes nor upbringing can guarantee that we become the person our parents want us to be. Nor is it right that parents should over-impose their will on children who have reached the age of maturity.

Often this is for the best. Abraham did not become an idolater like his father Terach. Menasheh, the archetypal evil king, was grandfather to Josiah, one of the best. These are important facts. Judaism places parenthood, education and the home at the heart of its values. One of our first duties is to ensure that our children know about and come to love our religious heritage. But sometimes we fail. Children may go their own way, which is not ours. If this happens to us we should not be paralysed with guilt. Not everyone succeeded with all their children, not even Abraham or Moses or David or Solomon. Not even God himself. "I have raised children and brought them up but they have rebelled against Me" (Is. 1:2).

Two things rescued the story of Moses and his children from tragedy. The book of Chronicles (1 Chron. 23:16, 24:20) refers to Gershom's son not as Jonathan but as Shevual or Shuvael, which the rabbis translated as "return to God". In other words, Jonathan eventually repented of his idolatry and became again a faithful Jew. However far a child has drifted, he or she may in the course of time come back.

The other is hinted at in the genealogy in Numbers 3. It begins with the words, "These are the children of Aaron and Moses," but goes on to list only Aaron's children. On this the rabbis say that because Moses taught Aaron's children they were regarded as his own. In general, "disciples" are called "children".

We may not all have children. Even if we do, we may, despite our best endeavours, find them at least temporarily following a different path. But we can all leave something behind us that will live on. Some do so by following Moses' example: teaching, facilitating or encouraging the next generation. Some do so in line with the rabbinic statement that "the real offspring of the righteous are good deeds." [2]

When our children follow our path we should be grateful. When they go beyond us, we should give special thanks to God. And when they choose another way, we must be patient, knowing that the greatest Jew of all time had the same experience with one of his grandchildren. And we must never give up hope. Moses' grandson returned. In almost

the last words of the last of the prophets, Malachi foresaw a time when God "will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers." The estranged will be reunited in faith and love.

[1] Note however that Rashi interprets the curse as limited specifically to Zimri descendant of Shimon, and Korach, descendant of Levi.

[2] Rashi to Gen. 6:9.

**AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL  
In a moment of zealousness, Pinchas earned eternal honor for himself and his family. As Rabbi Avigdor Miller, zt"l, explains, such is the power of zeal in the service of Hashem and His Torah.**

"Pinchas Ben Elazar Ben Aharon the kohen turned away my wrath from upon the sons of Israel by his zeal for my sake in their midst; and I did not bring destruction upon the sons of Israel because of my jealousy. Therefore, say, behold, I give to him my covenant of peace" (25:11-2). This is a special proclamation of acclaim. Though Moshe certainly approved of Pinchas, Hashem here teaches the necessity to render public recognition to the righteous.

"And they shall justify the just, and they shall condemn the wicked" (Devarim 25:1) actually means that the just shall be held up to public view as men all should admire, and that the wicked must be held up as examples of scorn and public shame. Thus, in the rare instances when a prophetic Bat Kol was heard during the Second Sanctuary era, we find an instance (in the Gemara in Sanhedrin) when this miraculous phenomenon was used to point out the excellence of Hillel; and similarly, a Bat Kol came forth later to proclaim the excellence of Shmuel the Little (ibid.).

"Hashem encourages the meek" (Tehillim 147:6) (i.e. the righteous) "but He lowers the wicked to the ground" (ibid.). "Condemning the wicked, and justifying the righteous" (I Kings 8:32): this is a principle of all the narrations of the Scriptures concerning the righteous.

Against every good man (or good deed) there will always be detractors and opponents, or at best the people will fail to appreciate properly the worth of the righteous and their deeds. Here in these verses Hashem supplies a model of how to react to the deeds of the righteous and how highly we should admire their personalities and publicize their importance.

Pinchas is commended for being jealous (i.e. his zeal) for Hashem, and this jealousy was especially commended for being performed in their midst, meaning in open public demonstration. This quality of public open speech or action on behalf of Hashem is especially prized. Moshe became angry when he saw any infraction of Hashem's Torah and was constantly commended by Hashem; we understand that Moshe was protecting the sons of Israel from the consequences of Hashem's wrath.

When Moshe, during the episode of the golden calf, broke the Tablets, it was a monumental deed of jealousy for Hashem's honor, and this prepared the way for the final pardon that was granted for that transgression. Similarly, when Abraham prayed that Sodom be spared destruction, Hashem consented if there would be ten righteous men, but the condition was made that they be righteous men in the midst of the city (Bereshis 18:26), meaning that they openly and publicly demonstrated their disapproval of the sins of the city. Just as the ketoret brings forgiveness from Hashem's retribution, even more does public action for the honor of Hashem and His Torah bring forgiveness. This is the highest ketoret of all.

In the following verse, a covenant of priesthood is bestowed upon him and his posterity. But the covenant of peace for Pinchas himself is a separate covenant whereby he is assured of peace throughout his lifetime (Bamidbar Rabbah 25:1). Why was Pinchas granted an assurance of peace throughout his lifetime? Because he brought peace to the sons of Israel. This is twice stated: 1) He turned away My wrath from the sons of Israel and 2) he was zealous for his G-d and atoned for the sons of Israel (25:13). The second statement is added to explain the priesthood was bestowed upon him because he atoned for the sons of Israel, therefore he and his posterity shall atone for Israel as kohanim. Thus we learn that the man who is zealous for Hashem and His Torah is considered as one who brings peace to Israel and protects them against misfortune; and therefore he deserves a long life of enjoying the fruits of his deeds.

Pinchas was active even in the days of the War of the Concubine at Giveah (Shoftim 20:28). Similarly, though Eliyahu Hanavi departed from men (II Kings 2:11), he was rewarded in not having to die like other men (ibid.) because he was zealous for Hashem (I Kings 19:10); and in our tradition the deathless Eliyahu appeared to the Sages numerous times. Men such as these have brought upon Israel the assurance that our nation would continue deathless.