

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Pinchas 5786

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Leadership and succession are discussed.

יִפְקֹד ה' אֱלֹקֵי הָרוּחַ לְכָל-בָּשָׂר אִישׁ עַל-הָעֵדָה:

“Let Hashem, the Lord of spirits for all flesh, choose a Man (leader) upon the congregation.” (Bamidbar 27:16).

Why did Moshe call Hashem the Lord of all spirit? Also, why use the term “יִפְקֹד” which means to consider or to count, instead of “בָּחַר” meaning to choose, ala Yisroel is the chosen nation (Devarim 7:6)? Why is this segment in the same segment as inheritance rights and the lauding of Pinchas? Why was Pinchas granted reward for stepping up, but not leadership? And is it a slight to him that Yehoshua was chosen?

In the various narratives of these perukim, the Torah provides the rules for succession: contributors, inheritance, and leadership. Pinchas stepped up and was rewarded for his contribution. However, he fell short of earning leadership of the entire nation. However, this does not diminish his contribution. All great leaders still require members to step up and contribute in meaningful ways.

The daughters of Tzelofchad opened the topic of inheritance. Their concern introduced the concept of continuity. Their concern was that if inheritance passes only through sons, their father's place within Eretz Yisroel will disappear. The Torah responded by providing the rules for physical inheritance. (Ibid 27:8-11). The Torah then immediately turns to another inheritance problem.

Hashem told Moshe, "Ascend this mountain of Abarim and see the Land... and you shall be gathered to your people" (Ibid 27:12-13). Hashem informed Moshe that his end is near. Having just witnessed the establishment of rules governing succession to land, Moshe now confronted the question of succession to leadership. His response was remarkable. He did not ask that one of his sons inherit his position. Instead, he asked that Hashem choose the leader. (Ibid 27:16). His reason is because the leader “shall go out from before them and he shall come in before them, and he shall take them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of Hashem shall not be like sheep that has no shepherd.” (Ibid 27:17). The daughters of Tzelofchad asked who will inherit their father's estate; Moshe asked who will inherit his monumental responsibility.

Land and property are inherited through family. Leadership is given to the worthy. Gershom and Eliezer were likely still alive. As they were born just before the geulas Mitzrayim, they would not have been included in the generation of twenty years to sixty years old passing away in the wilderness. (Ibid 14:29). Further, they were special people as his descendants became treasurers of the Mishkan (I Divrei Yomim 26:24) and of Dovid HaMelech's treasury (ibid 26:26). Moshe also did not even ask for Yehoshua, despite he being the ever-loyal steward.

The office of national leadership is not treated as hereditary property. Instead, Hashem chose Yehoshua. (Bamidbar 27:18). The contrast could not be clearer. The laws of inheritance are based upon bloodline. Inheritance of leadership is based upon character. The Torah even employs different language to highlight this. The daughters inherit because of bloodline. Yehoshua is selected because he is "a man in whom there is spirit." (Ibid). How did Yehoshua earn the leadership, especially above Pinchas?

At first glance, one might have expected Pinchas to emerge as the successor. Through his actions, he halted the plague that had struck Yisroel following the sin of Baal Peor. Hashem says, "Pinchas...has turned back My wrath from upon Bnei Yisroel when he zealously avenged My zeal among them" (Bamidbar 25:11). His reward was the covenant of peace. (Bamidbar 25:12). The lesson is that the covenant of peace goes together with eternal kahuna. (Ibid 25:13). Pinchas acted as a kohen. He removed impurity from the camp and restored the relationship between Hashem and Bnei Yisroel. His actions belong to the sphere of holiness and atonement.

What is the quality of a leader? The Torah subtly contrasts the descriptions of Pinchas and Yehoshua. Pinchas is praised because of zeal. (Ibid 25:11). Yehoshua is chosen because spirit resides in him. (Ibid 27:18). This is why Moshe calls Hashem "the Lord of spirit of all flesh." The phrase emphasizes the diversity of human beings. A leader must understand different personalities, different strengths, and different weaknesses. A congregation is not homogenous and a leader has to understand the uniqueness of every member. At the same time, he has to be like a shepherd who understands how to guide the entire flock and not lose any stray sheep.

A shepherd does not guide from the front. A shepherd guides from the rear. He has unique calls and he establishes a dominant ewe whom the others will follow. A shepherd requires patience, wisdom, and endurance. These are not the qualities of a zealot. A zealot deals with today's problem. A leader deals with tomorrow's problems today. He understands the lagger, the overachiever, and all in between.

Yehoshua proved that he prepared for this role for decades. His first appearance occurred during the war against Amalek, when Moshe commands him to "Choose men for us and go out and fight Amalek." (Shmos 17:9). He emerged as a military leader but also one that understood how to choose men. Later, he attended Moshe when Moshe ascended Har Sinai. (Ibid 24:13). Following the Molten Calf, Yehoshua "would not depart from within [Moshe's] tent." (Ibid 33:11). While others returned to their affairs, he remained in the presence of Torah and leadership. When Eldad and Medad began prophesying in the camp, Yehoshua immediately sought to defend Moshe's authority (Bamidbar 11:28). As one of the Scouts, Yehoshua stood against the majority and remained faithful when the nation succumbs to fear. (Ibid 14:6-9). Yehoshua was not a sudden (or one time) hero but as a lifelong apprentice. He spent forty years preparing for leadership. The structure of our parsha highlights this distinction. The narrative moves from Pinchas to the census (counting each person), to inheritance, to Moshe's impending end, and finally to leadership succession. A leader is not merely chosen. He is counted, considered, and calculated. He has to be a person that understands the very spirit that flows in all people. He is there to elevate and guide, not to control or defeat.