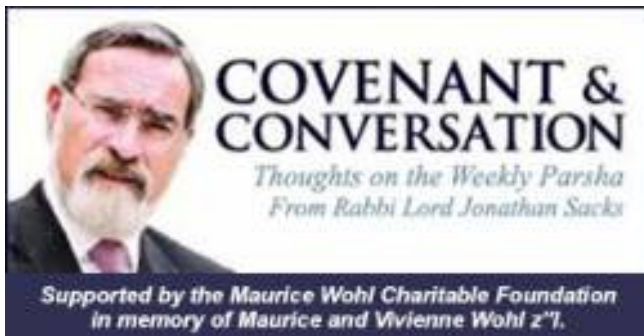


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Influence and Power

Knowing that he is about to die, Moses turns to God and asks him to appoint a successor:

Moses said to the Lord, "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." (Num. 27:15-17).

It is a farsighted, selfless gesture. As Rashi comments: "This is to tell the praise of the

righteous - that when they are about to leave this world, they put aside their personal needs and become preoccupied with the needs of the community." Great leaders think about the long-term future. They are concerned with succession and continuity. So it was with Moses. God tells Moses to appoint Joshua, 'a man in whom there is spirit'. He gives him precise instructions about how to arrange the succession:

"Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand on him. Have him stand before Eleazar the priest and the entire assembly and commission him in their presence. Give him some of your authority so the whole Israelite community will obey him... At his command he and the entire community of the Israelites will go out, and at his command they will come in." (Num. 27:18-21).

There are three actions involved here: [1] Moses was to lay his hand on Joshua, [2] have him stand before Eleazar the priest and the entire assembly, and [3] give him "some of your authority [*me-hodecha*]". What is the significance of this threefold process? What does it tell us about the nature of leadership in Judaism?

There is also a fascinating midrash about the first and third of these gestures:

And lay your hand on him - this is like lighting one candle with another. Give him some of your authority - this is like emptying one vessel into another. (Bamidbar Rabbah 21:15)

Beneath these enigmatic words is a fundamental truth about leadership.

In *L'esprit Des Lois* (1748), Montesquieu, one of the great political philosophers of the Enlightenment, set out his theory of the "separation of powers" into three branches: the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. Behind it lay a concern for the future of freedom if power were concentrated in a single source:

Liberty does not flourish because men have natural rights, or because they revolt if their leaders push them too far. It flourishes because power is so distributed and so organized that whoever is tempted to abuse it finds legal restraints in his way.

Montesquieu's source was not the Bible - but there is, in a verse in Isaiah, a strikingly similar idea:

For the Lord is our judge; the Lord is our law-giver; the Lord is our king; he will save us. (Isaiah 33:22)

This tripartite division can also be found in Devarim/Deuteronomy 17-18 in the passage dealing with the various leadership roles in ancient Israel: the king, the priest and the prophet. The sages later spoke about "three crowns" - the crowns of Torah, priesthood and kingship. Stuart Cohen, who has written an elegant book on the

subject, *The Three Crowns*, notes that "what emerges from the [biblical] texts is not democracy throughout the political system, but a distinct notion of power-sharing at its highest levels. Neither Scripture nor early rabbinic writings express any sympathy whatsoever for a system of government in which a single body all group possesses a monopoly of political authority."

The three-fold process through which Joshua was to be inducted into office had to do with the three types of leadership. Specifically the second stage - "Have him stand before Eleazar the priest and the entire assembly and commission him in their presence" - had to do with the fact that Moses was not a priest. His successor had to be formally recognized by the representative of the priesthood, Eleazar the High Priest.

Power and influence are often thought of as being the same kind of thing: those who have power have influence and vice versa. In fact, though, they are quite different. If I have total power and then decide to share it with nine others, I now have only one-tenth of the power I had before. If I have a certain measure of influence and then share it with nine others, I do not have less. I have more. Instead of one person radiating this influence, there are now ten. Power works by division, influence by multiplication.

Moses occupied two roles. He was the functional equivalent of a king. He made the key decisions relating to the people: how they should be organized, the route they were to take on their journey, when and with whom they should engage in war. But he was also the greatest of the prophets. He spoke the word of God.

A king had power. He ruled. He made military, economic and political decisions. Those who disobeyed him faced the possible penalty of death. A prophet had no power whatsoever. He commanded no battalions. He had no way of enforcing his views. But he had massive influence. Today we barely remember the names of most of Israel's and Judah's kings. But the words of the prophets continue to inspire by the sheer force of their vision and ideals. As Kierkegaard once said: When a king dies, his power ends; when a prophet dies, his influence begins.

Moses was to confer both roles on Joshua as his successor. "Lay your hand on him" means, give him your role as a prophet, the intermediary through whom God's word is conveyed to the people. To this day we use the same word, *semicha* (laying on of hands), to describe the process whereby a rabbi ordains his disciples. "Give him some of your authority [*me-hodecha*]" refers to the second role. It means, invest him with the power you hold as a king.

We now understand the midrash. Influence is like lighting one candle with another. Sharing your influence with someone else does not mean you have less; you have more. When we use the flame of a candle to light another candle, the first is not diminished. There is now, simply, more light.

Transferring power, though, is like emptying one vessel into another. The more power you give away, the less you have. Moses' power ended with his death. His influence, though, remains to this day.

Judaism has an ambivalent attitude towards power. It is necessary. Without it, in the words of Rabbi Hanina, deputy High Priest, "people would eat one another alive" (Avot 3:2). But Judaism long ago recognized that (to quote Lord Acton), power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Influence - the relation of prophet to people, teacher to disciple - is altogether different. It is a non-zero-sum game. Through it, both teacher and disciple grow. Both are enhanced.

Moses gave Joshua his power and his influence. The first was essential to the political and military tasks ahead. But it was the second that made Joshua one of the great figures of our tradition. Influence is simply more enduring than power.



The Difference Between Shimon and Levi

The Portion begins with the account of Pinchas' act of zealotry of killing Zimri and Kozbi. It is noteworthy that Pinchas came from the tribe of Levi and Zimri was from the Tribe of Shimon as this is the not the first time in the Torah that the two interacted. In Vayishlach, Shimon and Levi

wiped out the whole city of Shechem because the Prince, also named Shechem, violated their sister Dina. At that point, the Torah describes Shimon and Levi as ‘brothers’, indicating that they acted together in the same way. In Vayechi, Yaakov also calls them brothers¹, but criticizes them for their zealotry, curses their joint anger and states that they must be separated. Their fates do not again meet until the incident of Baal Peor, where they are on opposite sides – Zimri sins with the Midianite Princess, Kozbi, and Pinchas kills them both. In addition, Chazal tell us that the Tribe of Shimon were also involved in the sin² and protested after the killing of Zimri, but God praised it as a justified action done leshem Shamayim (for the sake of Heaven). It is also evident from the numbers of the Tribes after this incident, that the main sinners in Baal Peor were from the Tribe of Shimon as their numbers dwindled significantly after Baal Peor, indicating that many of them died in the plague, which was a punishment for the sins of Baal Peor.

The obvious question is how did the paths of Shimon and Levi divert so drastically, after their shared origins³? The key to answering this is based on the Netsiv’s explanation of the episode in Shechem⁴. He asserts that even though the two brothers acted together in wiping out Shechem for their role in the incident with Dina, nevertheless, they had very different motivations. Shimon’s primary consideration was repulsion of what Shechem had done to Dina as a member of Yaakov’s family, and how it had brought shame upon the family. In contrast, Levi was motivated by the outrage that Shechem had committed in

defiling the holiness of the Jewish nation which at that time, only comprised of Yaakov’s wives, children and grandchildren, yet he already saw them as a nation. Thus, Shimon was driven by family loyalty, whereas Levi was driven by loyalty to God and by extension to the holiness of His Chosen people.

Rabbi Uziel Milevsky demonstrates these two motives in the Torah’s description of the brother’s reaction to Shechem’s crime: “And the sons of Yaakov returned from the field, when they heard, the men were distressed and they seethed with anger, because [Shechem] had committed **an outrage against Yisrael, to lay with the daughter of Yaakov**, and such a thing is not done⁵.” Rav Milevsky explains that whenever the Torah refers to Yaakov as Yisrael, it is relating to his higher essence as a father of the Jewish people, thus, the expression, ‘an outrage against Yisrael’ expresses anger at the spiritual desecration of the holiness of the Jewish nation, In contrast, the use of the regular name, Yaakov, refers to him as an individual, thus the phrase, ‘to lay with the daughter of Yaakov’ alludes to disgust at the shame that had been brought on Yaakov’s family by this despicable act. Rabbi Milevsky explains, building on the Netsiv’s explanation, that Shimon was more concerned that Shechem lay with ‘the daughter of Yaakov’ whereas Levi was more focused on the ‘outrage against Yisrael.’

The Netsiv gives an example to prove the tribe of Levi’s overriding loyalty to God with their actions during the sin of the Golden Calf, where the tribe of Levi answered Moshe’s call to kill the sinners, even though some of them were members of their

own families. In contrast, Rabbi Milevsky points out Shimon's preponderant devotion to family loyalty over God's honor, by the tribe of Shimon's staunch defence of Zimri despite his heinous sin, and their criticism of Pinchas after his righteous act of zealotry.

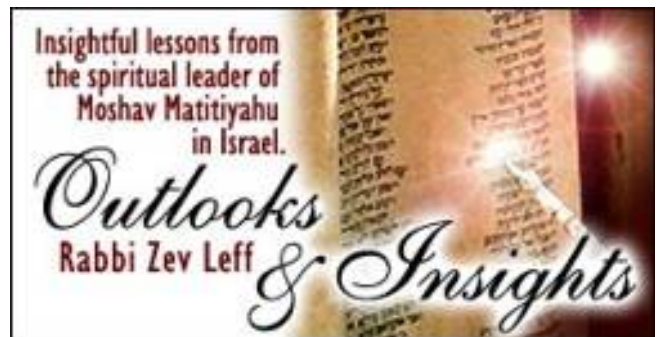
We can now understand how the paths of Shimon and Levi could diverge so drastically despite their seemingly identical initial behavior. Despite the fact that their actions were identical, their intentions were very disparate, and resulted in contrasting reactions to a situation where honor to God conflicted with family loyalty. The Tribe of Levi emulated their ancestor, Levi, by putting God's honor above everything else, while the Tribe of Shimon followed the example of their ancestor, Shimon, by putting family honor before God's honor.

A specific lesson that can be derived from this idea is that although it is very important to respect one's family, and especially one's parents, this does not come at the expense of one's relationship with God. This is most clearly borne out by the halacha that although one must generally listen to their parents' requests, this does not apply, if the request contradicts the Torah.

A more general lesson that we learn from the Netsiv the importance of the intention behind a person's actions – Shimon and Levi did identical actions, but their root motivations were so different that they led to drastically divergent behavior on the part of their descendants. The Ran⁶ makes this point with regard to Mitzva observance: He writes that it is conceivable that two people do the exact same action, and one of

them will gain far more reward than the other. The only difference between the two is their intention when they performed the action. In the context of the examples of Shimon and Levi, this idea plays out with regard to the reasons that we perform Mitzvot – it can be for common sense reasons, such as what drove Shimon, or for the sake of God. As their example proves, the difference will have a massive impact on how we live our lives.

1. *Bereishis*, 49:5.
2. *Rashi*, *Bereishis*, 49:6.
3. See the *Dvar Torah*, 'True zealotness' where the approach of *Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky zt"l*, is discussed. In the above *Dvar Torah*, the approach of the *Netsiv* will be used, with additional explanation from *Rav Uziel Milevsky, zt"l*, former Chief Rabbi of Mexico.
4. *Heemek Dvar*, *Bereishis*, 34:25, 49:8.
5. *Bereishis*, 34:7.
6. *Drashos HaRan*, *HaDrush Hashishi*, cited in 'Kaasher Tzivah HaShem', written by *Rav Avraham Garfinkel, shlit'a*, p.12.



The Function of a Leader

When Moses entreated God to appoint a leader to succeed him, God answered, "Before you command Me concerning My children, command My children concerning Me." Moses proceeded to command the Jewish people concerning the laws of the daily and holiday sacrifices.

In order to understand this Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni – Bamidbar 228), we must first understand the function of a Torah leader. When the Jewish people feared that Moses would not return from Mount Sinai, they beseeched Aaron to make them a leader who would walk before them. They viewed a leader as one who goes "before," accomplishing what his followers cannot. Thus, when Moses delayed, they felt helpless and in need of a new intermediary.

But when Moses requested that God choose a leader to replace him, he described the leader as one "who will go out before them and who will bring them out and bring them in." The leader was not to walk "before" the people; rather, he was to remain in constant contact with them. He could help bring them in and out by serving as a model to be emulated and as a guide and teacher, but the actual going in and out they would have to do for themselves.

The Talmud (Bava Basra 116a) instructs us that when a family member is sick one should go to a sage and ask for mercy. Meiri explains that from the sage one learns the ways of prayer so that he himself can ask for mercy for his sick relative. The ideal is not that the sage pray in one's place but that one learn from the sage how to pray.

Because Joshua was Moses' most devoted follower, he was chosen to succeed him. Joshua made himself completely subservient to Moses, never departing from his tent. The Talmud tells us: "The face of Moses was like the sun; that of Joshua like the moon. Woe for such a shame and such a disgrace." Joshua faithfully reflected the light of Moses, as the moon reflects the sun, and

thereby disgraced all who did not. Joshua showed that he understood that a Jewish leader does not act instead of the people, but rather provides a model to follow. Because he understood this more clearly than any of his contemporaries, he was chosen to succeed Moses.

COMMON CAUSE

The Jewish leader has another crucial function: uniting the people in a common cause. Korach contended that if the entire congregation is holy, then there is no need for a leader to rule over them. He presented his challenge with the homily of a *tallit* that is wholly *techelet* (blue), which, he argued, should not require *tzitzit*. He contended that if a person is totally developed ethically, to the point where his clothing, his character and honor are represented by the *techelet* of God's throne, then the *tzitzit*, the reminders of the mitzvot, are superfluous. Similarly a leader, whose purpose is to coax and direct the people toward the proper goals, would also be unnecessary to one who is fully developed ethically.

Korach failed to appreciate the communal nature of the Jewish people, whose perfection is only reached through a united effort, one in which each Jew fulfills his unique role. The leader serves the function of an orchestra conductor, guiding each player so that the entire orchestra plays together. Even one whose character is perfect still needs a leader to show him how he can function and fulfill his part in harmony with the community.

Thus *tzitzit* are a reminder of all 613 mitzvot that the community as a whole is capable of

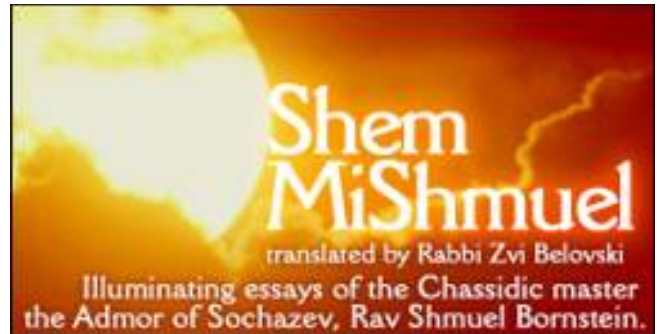
performing, not the limited number of mitzvot any individual can perform.

COLLECTIVE STRIVING

God told Moses, "Before I appoint a leader to succeed you, first you must command the people concerning the sacrifices." An appreciation of the necessity of communal striving necessarily preceded the appointment of a leader. Just as the offerings of individuals only have meaning in the context of the person's striving to draw closer to God, so too, the communal sacrifices require the collective striving of the Jewish people for unity and harmony in service of God.

The Kohen is necessary for achieving this unity, but he cannot substitute for the striving of the people themselves. For this reason, representatives of the Levites and the tribes also had to be present at the bringing of each of the communal sacrifices.

The greatness of our leaders is commensurate with the caliber of their followers. May we be on a level to appreciate authority and to emulate our leaders in order that they be as the leaders of old, culminating with our ultimate leader, Moshiach.



Pinchas and Kayin

The end of Parshas Balak describes how Bilam managed to lure some of *klal Yisrael* into inappropriate relationships with Moabite women and ultimately into idolatry. One man, Zimri, a prince of the tribe of Shimon, brazenly conducted a sexual liaison with Kazbi, a Moabite princess. To the dismay of many of the communal leaders, Pinchas, a grandson of Aharon, took a spear and executed both of the culprits. The *sidrah* opens with the conclusion of this story, in which Pinchas is praised for his zeal, and he is promised that he and his descendants will be *kohanim* for all time:

It shall be for him and his seed after him a covenant of everlasting priesthood, for he was zealous for his God and he made atonement for the Children of Yisrael. (Bemidbar 25:13)

And it shall be for him - this covenant. A covenant of everlasting priesthood - for even though the priesthood was already given to the seed of Aharon, it was only given to Aharon and his sons who were anointed with him and their descendants who would be born after

their anointing. However, Pinchas, who was born before this, was not anointed and was not included among the *kohanim* until now. As it is taught in Zevachim (101b), Pinchas was not made a *kohen* until after he killed Zimri. (Rashi loc. cit.)

This is most interesting. Why was Pinchas not made a *kohen* until now? Although Rashi provides a pragmatic reason, what lies behind this? Let us begin with an important quote from the Zohar:

Come and see! Any *kohen* who kills someone is forever invalidated from the *kehunah* [priesthood], for this act certainly abrogates his spiritual level. As for Pinchas [after he killed Zimri and Kazbi] according to the law he was excluded from the *kehunah* forevermore. And because he was zealous for God, He needed to give to him a brand-new *kehunah*, for him and his descendants after him, for all generations. (Zohar HaKadosh 3:214a)

This text cannot mean that Pinchas received the *kehunah* for killing Zimri. If so, it would not have been a reward. Rather, he would have retained it, despite the fact that he should have lost it. Instead, let us propose a mystical explanation.

The Arizal notes that Pinchas found his spiritual roots in Kayin, the son of Adam and Chavah, who killed his brother, Hevel. As such, Pinchas had the murderous tendencies of Kayin deep within him and thus was intrinsically unsuitable for

membership of the *kehunah*. The fault within his personality would have to be expunged before he could receive the gift of *kehunah*. This was achieved by killing Zimri.

KAYIN

This obviously needs much explanation. Let us briefly consider the personality of Kayin. The name Kayin finds its root in the word *kinyan* (acquisition). Indeed, when he was born, the Torah records:

She conceived and gave birth to Kayin, and she said, "I have acquired a man from God." (Bereishis 4:1)

The name of a person always indicates his true nature. In this case, we discover that Kayin was a man who saw himself as significant - an entity of substance, a person who himself was an "acquisition." This apparently small fault was the cause of all of the evil he perpetrated, for he saw himself as important, even to the extent that he placed himself above God. Apart from murdering his brother:

Our Sages tell us:

The twin of Hevel was the fairest of women, and Kayin desired her in his heart. He said, "I'll kill Hevel, my brother, and take his twin from him..." (Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer 21)

There are also rabbinical traditions that Kayin's reverence for himself led to idolatry and denial of God's supervision of the world. The arrogance and self-importance which so characterized Kayin led to the worst sins, for we have seen that he

murdered and committed sexual immorality and idolatry.

But, as always, every bad trait has a counterpart which is productive. The very same motivation which led Kayin to do all of these terrible sins can also lead to a profound appreciation of human worth. The chronicler describes King Yehoshofat as follows:

His heart was lifted up in the ways of God... (Divrei HaYamim II 17:6)

While the king indeed saw himself as a significant, valuable person, he directed this feeling toward Divine service. Chazal mention:

Every individual must say, "Because of me, the world was created."
(Sanhedrin 38a)

The ability to say this, and to genuinely feel it to be true, stems from the good side of Kayin's character trait. We must consider ourselves important and worthy and that our contribution to the world is of paramount value. This explains the real intention behind Chavah's exclamation when Kayin was born: "I have acquired a man from God." He was to be a man of self-worth, a person who knew his own value. But this was to be utilized *for* God and not in self-aggrandizement. Regrettably, it was Kayin himself who misused his powers, becoming instead an egocentric sinner.

PINCHAS

As we have mentioned, Pinchas was endowed with the same spiritual root as Kayin. It was thus his task to utilize Kayin's character trait, not as his

ancestor had done, but productively and within the Torah framework. Pinchas was most successful at this task. We have seen that he was described as "zealous for his God" when he killed Zimri and Kazbi. He was not actually obliged to perform this execution, but was entitled to do so under a complex and misunderstood law. Pinchas was a man of such spiritual sensitivity that he could not bear to witness Zimri's flagrant sin and so acted to restore the honor of God. This was the moment at which he demonstrated that he had overcome his "Kayin" tendency and redirected it to good purposes.

When Pinchas felt unable to tolerate the sin of Zimri and Kazbi, it was his personality expressing itself. Indeed, no other member of the nation was motivated to act against them to punish their sin. But as Pinchas felt a great degree of self-worth, he was personally affronted by their actions. He directed these feelings into zeal for God and hence acted alone to punish them. He, as did Yehoshofat, "lifted his heart in the ways of God."

It is significant that Pinchas did not act in response to a command from God, but took his own initiative. This was a further indication that his zeal was genuine and God-oriented, for no one in *klal Yisrael*, nor even God himself, could have obliged him to act. When he did so, he demonstrated a deep personal commitment to God's honor and image in the world.

Through his actions, Pinchas rectified the damage done by those of the nation who sinned with the Moabite women. They had committed immoral acts with those women and worshipped Ba'al Pe'or, the vile deity of Mo'av. Additionally, they



Pinchas (Numbers 25:10-30:1) *advanced compendium*

so lowered themselves by these foul acts that they diminished their human status; this is akin to murder. When Pinchas stepped forward to stem the tide of sin he:

...turned back My anger from upon the Children of Yisrael by being zealous on My behalf among them, so I did not destroy the Children of Yisrael with My zealotry. (Bemidbar 25:11)

By so doing, Pinchas rectified Kayin's residual defect which lay deep within him. Kayin's ego prompted him to commit idolatry, murder, and sexual immorality. Pinchas, in contrast, used the very same trait to undo the damage caused by these three cardinal sins. This done, Pinchas could now receive the gift of everlasting *kehunah*, which had been denied him thus far.

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