



## Parshas Pinchas

For the week ending 19 Tammuz 5759  
2 & 3 July 1999

### Overview

Hashem tells Moshe to inform Pinchas that Pinchas will receive Hashem's "covenant of peace" as reward for his bold action — executing Zimri and the Midianite princess Kozbi. Hashem commands Moshe that the people must maintain a state of enmity with the Midianites because they lured the Jewish People into sin. Moshe and Elazar are told to count the Jewish People. The Torah lists the names of the families in each tribe. The total number of males eligible to serve in the army is 601,730. Hashem instructs Moshe how to allot the Land of Israel to Bnei Yisrael. The number of the Levites' families is recorded. The daughters of Tzlofchad file a claim with Moshe: In the absence of a brother, they request their late father's portion in the Land. Moshe asks Hashem for the ruling, and Hashem tells Moshe that the daughters' claim is just. The Torah teaches the laws and priorities which determine the order of inheritance. Hashem tells Moshe that he will ascend a mountain and view the Land that the Jewish People will soon enter, although Moshe himself will not enter. Moshe asks Hashem to designate the subsequent leader of the people, and Hashem selects Yehoshua bin Nun. Moshe ordains Yehoshua as his successor in the presence of the entire nation. The Parsha concludes with special teachings of the service in the Beit Hamikdash.

### Insights

#### STATUS SIMPLE

#### "Pinchas...son of Aharon the kohen" (25:11)

Not so long ago, a member of a royal family died a violent and tragic death. There was an outpouring of unparalleled grief at this event.

That people should mourn a life cut off in its prime is understandable. Remarkable, however, was the spectacle of a world rending its clothes and beating its breast at the demise of a self-confessed adulteress. Youth, beauty and royalty apparently can gild marital treachery and turn it into the stuff of true life romance.

This singular flood of tears, however, was not a mere aberration of public sense and sensibility. From time immemorial there has existed such a double standard in society. Throughout history, kings have exercised what the French in their exquisitely delicate manner call the *droit de seigneur* — "the right of the master." This was the accepted custom of the ruler to claim the first night of any marriage.

In this week's Parsha, Pinchas puts an end to a plague which has killed 24,000. The cause of this plague was a spree of immorality with the women of Midian and Moav. Instead of applauding his action, however, the people accused him of murder. Interestingly, the accusation leveled at him was that: "This grandson of an idol-worshipper had the gall to kill a prince of Israel." If you think about it, what does the social status of Pinchas have to do with whether or not his actions were justified? And what does it matter that the man he justly executed was a prince?

What is considered adultery amongst the hoi-polo is gilded as romance amongst the glitterati. Status makes everything permissible.

#### PROCESSED PEACE

#### "My covenant of peace" (25:12)

Everyone wants peace. Every person wants to sit under his fig tree, secure that no one will come and take away his family and his money. Yet almost since the beginning of time, peace has been elusive, and often, illusory.

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If there's one Hebrew word that everyone knows, it's *shalom*. "Peace." *Shalom* is the Hebrew form of greeting. Why do we greet others with *shalom*?

The Talmud tells us that it is forbidden to say *shalom* in a bathhouse, because *Shalom* is G-d's name, and thus not fitting to be uttered in a bathhouse.

What does it mean that G-d's name is *Shalom*?

Real *shalom* doesn't exist in this world because *shalom* means perfection, completion. This world was created lacking. That's the way it's meant to be. This world strives to arrive somewhere beyond itself for its completion.

The Hebrew word for the "earth" is *aretz*, from the root "ratz," "to run," because this world is always running, moving towards its completion. However its completion can come only from above, from Heaven. The word "Heaven" in Hebrew is *shamayim*, from the root "sham" which means "there." This world is always "running" to "there" — outside and beyond itself.

This world contains many wonderful things, but perfection isn't one of them. Perfection is beyond the scope of creation.

This is why G-d's name is *Shalom*. G-d is the Perfection of all the lacking of this world. Every single thing in this world finds its perfection, its fulfillment, in Him. It's not here. It's above. It's "there."

### THE PEACE CONNECTION

In the Book of Ruth, Boaz greets the harvesters by using the name of G-d. From here we learn that a Jew may use G-d's Name as a greeting, and it is not considered taking Heaven's Name in vain. In fact, there is an opinion that we are *obliged* to greet each other with G-d's name by saying

"*Shalom*." Why should we be obliged to greet each other using G-d's name? What's wrong with "Good Morning!" or "Have a nice day!"

Sometimes we look at other people and we think that we are a million miles from them. But no man is an island to himself. When two people meet, the essence of their meeting is to make each other more complete. The fundamental principle of interpersonal relationships is that when I meet my fellow being, I am coming to effect his or her *shleimut* (completion). That's what I'm doing in this world.

G-d placed us in a world which demands to be perfected. Our whole relationship with the world and everything in it is a "Peace Process" — a process of bringing every person and every blade of grass to a state of *shleimut* — the true definition of peace.

In *Parshat Vayetze*, Yaakov lays his head down to sleep on some stones. The stones all vie to be the stone on which Yaakov will sleep. The result is that all the stones gather together and became one stone. What do we learn from this? The message of the stones is that completion results from the connection of disparate entities into a single whole.

When we connect with other people on whatever level, whether in business or in love, whether in school on the bus, our entire connection between ourselves and our fellow beings must be with the intention to bring the other person to a state of completion. That's why a Jew is obliged to greet others with "*Shalom*!" For when we seek to bring each other to a state of completion, to *shalom*, the world reaches its ultimate fulfillment.

And that's the real peace process.

## Haftarah: Yirmiyahu 1:1- 23

"Divrei Yirmiyahu" is the first haftara of the "Three-of-Affliction" trilogy read between 17 Tammuz and 9 Av. It contains Jeremiah's ominous vision of Israel's impending ruin and first exile at the hand of Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar.

Yirmiyahu's vision of a menacing, almond-wood rod indicates that the time of Israel's punishment is ripening, like the hasty ripening of an almond; a cauldron boiling at its north lip warns that Israel's northern neighbor, Babylon, will wield that rod. Yet if they repent, G-d will remember their "youthful kindness" when, as a fledgling nation, they forsook a familiar Egypt and like a starry-eyed bride followed G-d into a frightening wasteland.

### SUPER VISION

Malbim, in his introduction to the Book of Yirmiyahu, notes that this book contains more "irregularities" in spelling and grammar than any other book of Tanach. This, explains Malbim, is due to the exalted nature of

Yirmiyahu's vision, which can almost be compared to that of Moshe's. Just as the Five Books of Moses contain untold layers of meaning, many of them hinted through oddities of spelling and grammar, so too, the book of Yirmiyahu reaches beyond the normal bounds of expression due to Yirmiyahu's lofty grasp, above that of most other prophets.

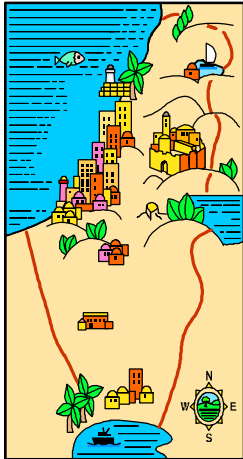
The Sages sum up the Book of Yirmiyahu as "entirely destruction." Even in English "a jeremiah" is short for any predictor of gloom and doom. Why, indeed, did G-d specifically invest such a great Prophet, one of the very greatest, with the vision of Israel's destruction and exile?

"All G-d does is for the good," say our Sages. Perhaps Yirmiyahu's exalted perception was the very reason he was chosen to bring word of the exile; from his lofty vantage point, he — like no other in his generation — could perceive the joy hidden in the tears.

# LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

## YAM KINNERET (SEA OF GALILEE)



Also referred to in various cultures as the Sea of Galilee and the Sea of Tiberias, this beautiful harp-shaped lake is one of the most beautiful sites of the Land, and one of its most important sources of fresh water and fish.

Some say that its very name comes from its similarity to the *kinor* (Hebrew for harp), either because of its shape or the musical sound of its waves.

Lying 212 meters below the level of the Mediterranean, this lake is 13 miles long and 8 miles at its greatest width, with a circumference of 33 miles.

The beauty of the area and the swimming and boating that the lake affords have made the Kinneret region a popular resort area for Israeli residents as well as visitors from abroad. The city of Teveria (Tiberias) is the most important of the cities in the area and the site of some famous tombs.