



GROWTH

At The SHABBAT TABLE

PARSHAT PINCHAS

Leveling Up

Our Sages explain that when G-d appointed Aharon as a *kohen*, He told him that this special status would befall him, his sons, and the sons who will be born to them (in the future). At that point, Aharon's sons did not have children of their own – except for one, Elazar, who had already fathered Pinchas. Thus, Pinchas was interestingly the only “*kohen*” who had been excluded from the *kehunah*, which set the stage for Hashem to reward him with a “covenant of eternal *kehunah*” after he zealously defended the honor of G-d (see Bamidbar ch. 25). This “covenant of eternal *kehunah*” would spell the future for many *kohanim gedolim* to descent from Pinchas, thus awarding him a much deeper connection to the *kehunah* than otherwise possible.

This episode in the Torah offers much food for thought. Just imagine a (fictitious) day in the life of Pinchas before this incident. It was shortly after the exodus from Egypt while Bnei Yisrael was in the desert, and two Jews bump into each other. One of them was Pinchas, and the other happened to be some “random” Jew from the tribe of Asher. This was an era long before everyone had social media accounts or profile pictures, so despite Pinchas' unique lineage, the “random” Jew had no idea who this individual was. As they begin conversing, they couldn't help but touch upon the timeless Jewish query: “So... where are you from?” The great Pinchas revealed that his father was none other than Elazar. “You mean, the son of Aharon, the *kohen gadol*?” Pinchas nodded in the affirmative. “Wow! That must make you a *kohen*, right?” This was the part where Pinchas, perhaps crestfallen, had to explain that he was the one who got away – the “black sheep of the family” who lacked the status of a *kohen*.

As the outlier, Pinchas had two options. He could have looked up at Heaven and complained: “Why me?” He could have allowed the despondency to control him and the annoyance to blind him. When he saw the despicable events transpiring in the camp with Zimri and Cozbi, he could have allowed his own anger to overtake him and drive him to take vengeance, which ultimately would have consumed him. However, Pinchas chose a different course. He tuned in to his authentic self, a soul which was ignited with a passionate love for Hashem. He channeled his fire and energy solely for the sake of Heaven, as the Torah openly testifies: “*In his zealotness for My sake.*” It was only because he made the second choice that he was able to unlock a treasure that had been buried deep inside him all along and end up with a covenant of eternal *kehunah*. Through his passion for moral justice and preserving the honor of Hashem, he revealed his true core and became a *kohen* in his own merit, thus earning much more than a naturally-born *kohen*.

We all have greatness inside of us. Do we allow our purest selves to unearth it, or our superficial egos to bury it?

(Based on a d'var Torah from R' Shlomo Farhi)

From You

I heard a profound insight from R' YY Jacobson. Chazal teach in Pirkei Avot (2:1): דע מה למעלה ממך, which is understood in its literal reading as “know what is above you.” Simply, it calls for a constant awareness of G-d's supervision of the world. On a deeper level, the Ba'al Shem Tov would read the line to portray another powerful message.

“דע” – *you should know that* מה
“למעלה” – *that which is above,*
“ממך” – *is from you!*

In other words, we can never underestimate or downplay our own conduct. The way we act has a tremendous spiritual effect on the world. Boreh Olam gave us the power to bring down positive energy from Heaven when we perform mitzvot and acts of kindness. Think about how many mitzvot you perform in your life, even the “simple ones” that may be taken for granted. By you keeping Shabbat or donning tefillin or eating kosher, who knows how much less illness and suffering descends to the world and how much *shefa* and blessing pours down? Even by just reacting with patience, kindness, and *emuna* to certain stimuli, who knows how much Divine mercy is being attributed in Heaven just because of you? So deep is our connection with G-d that He gives us such power. Never forget that there are no limitations for an infinite soul; one “small” deed can go a very long way.

*“We all came in on
different ships, but we're
all in the same boat now.”*

Refuah Sheleimah, b'toch she'ar cholei Yisrael:

Rahamim Ben Shifra Yitzhak Ben Naama Chana Bat Malka Miriam Ahuva Bat Esther
Miriam Bat Bakol Frida Bat Yaffa Ariel Ben Frida Shmuel Ben Chaya Ariel Ben Olga
Yehuda Ben Tzivva Heleni Orna Bat Chen Chana Zev Ben Golda Yitzhak Ben Varda