

Elazar, a son of Aharon, took for himself from the daughters of Putiel as a wife, and she bore to him Pinchas. (6:25)

Rashi comments that the name Putiel refers to two ancestors of the wife of Elazar: Yisro and Yosef. Putiel was a name given to Yisro, because he fattened calves for idol worship. (Putiel is a contraction of Putim, fatten, and *I'Kail*, to G-d, for idol-worship – not Hashem.) Yosef *HaTzaddik* is also called Putiel (Putiel being derived from *pitpet b'yitzro*), because he disparaged or toyed with his *yetzer hora*). This was not Yisro's only other name. He had seven names. Why is it that with regard to Elazar's wife, mother of Pinchas, the name of Yisro which is used is one that has a derogatory connotation?

Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl, explains that, while at first blush Putiel does seem to signify negativity, if we were to look "outside the box," beyond surface appearances, we realize that the consequences of Yisro's fattening calves for *avodah zarah* were not that negative. Yisro's idol worship was purposeful. He was looking for the real thing. Thus, he served every religion under the sun until he found the true religion, the one true G-d, Creator and Master of the world. So, while fattening calves for idol worship is certainly not a laudatory endeavor, it may be viewed in an acceptable manner. Yisro searched for the truth. As a result of his fattening calves, he found it! Thus, Putiel is far from derogatory. It was his *modus operandi* for finding the truth – for finding Hashem!

The *Rosh Yeshivah* observes that character traits are transferred hereditarily through the family lineage. Yisro made searching for the truth, an inexorable intolerance for anything that smacked of falsehood, a part of his essence; to a degree – it was his life's mission. This quality was inherited by his descendants, of whom Pinchas stood out. Years later, when the leader of the tribe of Shimon, Zimri *ben Salu*, flagrantly and in complete abandon of Torah law and the nations' rabbinic leadership, challenged Hashem with an act of public moral desecration, Pinchas was the one who saw through the darkness and ambiguity and took action. The Torah teaches us that when Zimri came before Moshe *Rabbeinu* and the Elders, "the Elders wept at the entrance of the *Ohel Moed*" (*Bamidbar*25:1-7). *Chazal* (*Sanhedrin* 82a) explain that they wept because they had forgotten the law of *kanaim pogin bo*, the zealous one should take action and kill the perpetrator who had liaised with the gentile woman. Pinchas was imbued with the ability to uncover the truth, to see through the forces of darkness, recalled the *halachah* and saved the day. Thus, Putiel is far from disgraceful.

Rivkah *Imeinu* grew up in an environment that was clearly not conducive to positive spiritual growth. Yet, she rose above her murky roots and became the second Matriarch, the woman who successfully filled the void in Yitzchak's life left by the passing of his mother, Sarah *Imeinu*. Growing up with a father such as Besuel and a brother like Lavan, she developed a perception of the destructive forces of evil. She was surrounded by it, and she was able to transcend it. In the long run, she sort of benefitted from this arrangement, since she was now able to see through

Eisav's ruse, his smokescreen of false piety. She saw him for who he was and did not fall prey to his sham. She clearly perceived the hollowness of his life, the falseness and hypocrisy. In her situation, like that of Pinchas, the murky background from which she emerged served a positive purpose.