

## Therefore, say: Behold! I give him my covenant of peace. (25:12)

At times, taking a stand for what is right requires enormous courage. Taking a stand, acting boldly to uphold Divine will, requires that one be an authentic *yarei Shomayim*, G-d-fearing Jew. Many “talk the talk,” but, when the situation demands that he “walk the walk,” his feet suddenly begin to hurt. Two individuals, (Tzelafchad’s daughters were actually five) Pinchas and *Bnos Tzelafchad*, went against the prevailing spiritual current, and either took decisive action or spoke up when it was not popular, and Hashem rewarded them. Why did they do it? Because it was the *ratzon Hashem*, Divine will. Let us delve into their actions, so that they inspire and impact our lives, allowing for the *ratzon Hashem* to serve as our lodestar in navigating the peaks and valleys of life. Our guiding question should be: What does Hashem want me to do?

*Bnei Yisrael* encamped at Shittim. Sadly, it was a place in which the pagan nations were able to lead them to inappropriate behavior, including idolatry with the Moavite women. The moral lapse led to a punishment – a severe plague that decimated the guilty participants. Zimri ben Salu, the *Nasi* of the tribe of Shimon, sought to make a point. He took Cozbi, a Moavite princess, and publicly committed a despicable, immoral act. He dared Moshe *Rabbeinu* to do something about it. [Incidentally, during our history, one despot has always existed who cannot tolerate the influence the *gedolim*, righteous Torah leaders, have over the nation. They attribute their control to personal ambition, when, in fact, the Torah leaders are only following Hashem’s directive. The “influence” is the Torah.] Pinchas saw the outrage and took decisive action – killing them both. His act of zealotry put a halt to the plague. The message was clear: Moshe was the leader of the Jewish People – handpicked by Hashem. Pinchas displayed his unwavering commitment, putting his life and reputation in danger, because, after all, it was the *ratzon Hashem*. Divine will trumps personal interest.

*Bnos Tzelafchad*, the five daughters of Tzelafchad, faced the prospect of their father’s name and legacy being lost, as he had no sons. *Halachah* favors male descendants. Demonstrating remarkable courage and faith, they approached Moshe requesting their deceased father’s portion in the Holy Land. Moshe brought their case to Hashem, Who responded affirmatively, stating that their claim was just, thereby establishing a precedent that daughters would inherit when the father had no son.

The *Netziv* explains that the timing of their request is crucial to understanding the *psak*, *halachic* ruling. It followed the slanderous reports of the *meraglim*, spies – who, although punished for their insidious speech, nonetheless left a negative taste for the nation to absorb. They were led to believe that *Eretz Yisrael* was a land that “devours its inhabitants” and whose present dwellers were a strong, unconquerable nation.

Both narratives exemplify individuals, who, guided by their faith and understanding of the *ratzon*

*Hashem*, acted decisively, despite personal risk and being contrary to societal norms. Pinchas' zealotry and *Bnos Tzela'fchad's* advocacy highlight the significance of standing up for what is right – if, according to the Torah, it is right and just. Thus, both Pinchas and *Bnos Tzela'fchad* turned to Moshe for guidance. We must act in alignment with Divine principles – even if it is not popular in the environment that surrounds us.

*Horav Yechiel Tzucker, Shlita*, relates the story of a popular *maggid shiur*, who under no circumstances permitted his students to leave in middle of *seider*. As far as he was concerned, everything could wait – post office, dentist/doctor's appointments, parents – everyone could wait until after *seider*, and they had better return on time. This was an affable *Rebbe* who was easy to get along with, highly respected and admired – but, with regard to Torah study, he accepted no compromise, offered no flexibility whatsoever. At the end of the *yeshivah* year, the *bochurim* all came to say good-bye and receive the *Rebbe's* warm blessing for a restful, productive summer *bein ha'zmanim*. One thing gnawed at them: their *Rebbe* was a very easy person who had many friends and was loved by his students. Why was he so impossibly inflexible with regard to *seider*? He explained with the following story:

"I was once a single *bachur* in *yeshivah*. I was considered a top student and was blessed to find my *bashert*, Heavenly-designated match, in no time. My father and future father-in-law took it upon themselves to purchase an apartment for us at a reasonable price – one to which they were both in agreement. As the date of our wedding approached and still no apartment, I decided to take things into my own hands. I decided to close my *Gemorah*, take off time from *yeshivah*, and go apartment hunting.

"I met a real estate broker who showed me an apartment that fit our criteria exactly. I said I would speak with my future father-in-law. When I described the apartment to him, my father-in-law said that he had seen a "for sale" sign for this apartment on the *shul's* bulletin board. We proceeded to the seller and made the deal. It was then that the agent became livid, claiming that he had shown me the apartment first, and, as such, deserved his customary fee as a broker. I replied that I had taken the apartment because my father-in-law had seen the sign in *shul*. It made no difference. This man was bent on extracting his fee from me. He took me to court where I was obligated to pay him 25,000 *shekel*, which was a considerable amount of money. As a result, we were compelled to cut back on the furniture and appliances that were important to us. We had just lost a considerable amount of money – because had I closed my *Gemorah* one day to go apartment hunting.

"The story is not yet over. There is more. After this fiasco, I made a firm decision to prioritize my Torah learning, and that, under no circumstances, would I take a break/close my *Gemorah* to pursue a mundane objective that was not life-threatening. Torah was paramount.

"Ten years passed, and I was approached by a friend whom I knew from my early days at the *yeshivah*. He had an investment for me to consider. I was interested; after all, before I would realize, my children would grow up and weddings, apartments and *kollel* support would become a

way of life. A *maggid shiur*'s salary could not compensate for such expenses. Apparently, the city of Ashkelon was selling parcels of land. His goal was to put together a Torah-oriented *shechunah*, neighborhood. His strategy was to purchase the land at bargain- basement prices, and, within a year, the price of the real estate would double. This was one of those "you have nothing to lose and all to gain – too good to be true" ventures. He needed 25,000 dollars (four times the amount of *shekalim* which he had lost ten years earlier). I explained that I did not carry that sum in my pocket. I would have to make a loan from the bank, where my credit was good. I added that now is the time for second *seder* in the *kollel* where I learn. I could go to the bank only during *bein hasedarim*. The bank's hours did not coincide with my schedule. They were open *bein ha'sedarim*: once a week on Wednesday. Today is Sunday; I will go on Wednesday.

"That Wednesday, as I prepared to go to the bank, my young son fell, requiring a trip to the doctor and stitches. By the time I returned, I barely made it to *seder* on time. I had missed the bank. Needless to say, my friend was beside himself. We had no alternative but to wait until the following week. The following week, I went to the bank, took out a loan and immediately went to my friend's home to share the good news. By now, you can imagine what happened. The entire deal from beginning to end was a sham, the workings of a disreputable real estate broker, who made away with the life's savings of many an unsuspecting investor – of which my friend was one. Apparently, he was so taken in by the broker that he had convinced his parents, many family members and friends – who all lost every penny they had invested. His friend was afraid to leave his apartment for fear of what the investors he had convinced would do to him."

The *maggid shiur* looked at his *talmidim* for a few moments, allowing the story to sink in. He then said, "When I closed my *Gemorah* the first time, I lost 25,000 *shekalim*. When I refused to close it and refrained from taking time off from *seder* – I saved 25,000 dollars. Now you know why I will not compromise on Torah study – mine, or yours."