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אור ישראל

Self Inspired

PARSHAS
PINCHAS

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A TIMELY QUESTION

Sandwiched between the census of *Klal Yisrael* and Moshe's appointment of Yehoshua as the next leader, we have the narrative of the daughters of Tzelafchad. As a group, they approached Moshe with a simple question — "Our father died, and we have no brothers. What will become of his portion of *Eretz Yisrael*?"¹

While it is true that this question introduced laws that were not yet known to *Klal Yisrael*, there does not seem to be anything special about this query, more than the other myriad questions that come to a *rav* on a daily basis. However, the *Medrash*² relates a truly heroic aspect of this simple story. Some background — subsequent to Aharon's passing, members of *Klal Yisrael* complained about the daily *mun* they ate. Their grievance was so great, they were ready to turn back to Egypt. It was at this point the daughters of Tzelafchad approached Moshe, asking about the laws of inheritance in *Eretz Yisrael*. Moshe was astounded. The question was simple, but the meaning behind it was moving. "At a time like this, when *Klal Yisrael* demands to return to *Mitzrayim*, you are asking about *Eretz Yisrael*?" Their response? "We are confident the *Bnei Yisrael* will indeed inherit the land of Israel."

The *Medrash* compares their actions to Noach in his generation, and Avraham in his. Because of Noach and Avraham's heroic actions, they received the reward coming to the rest of the generation. So, too, the daughters of Tzelafchad received the reward coming to those who were complaining.

R' Mordechai Ilan³ (1915–1981) highlights the great value in doing what's right, despite one's surroundings. One would not think to include the daughters of Tzelafchad in the same group as Noach and Avraham. However, the comparison makes sense once we recognize the difficulty in 'going against the flow.' The context in which an action is taken is so important, it can catapult a seemingly innocuous act into one of heroic proportions.

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Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

There's no doubt about it, doing the right thing can be difficult in the best of times, all the more so when those around us are indifferent, or worse, hostile.

What strategy or exercise can one engage in, to be able to stand strong against the influence and jeers of those around us?

One suggestion is to remind ourselves, through repetition or imagination, the great value in the act that we are doing.¹

One wouldn't drive a car through a red light into a busy intersection, even if everyone were honking and demanding they do so. This is because we instantly recognize the importance and value of staying put.

Similarly, the more we truly understand the great value in our actions, and how Hashem is rooting for us, the more we will be able to withstand the pressure others may put on us.

¹ *Ya'aros Devash*, 10

¹ *Bamidbar* 27:1-4

² *Yalkut Shimoni* 773

³ *Mikdash Mordechai*, *Pinchas*

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If we want our children and grandchildren to continue along the proper path, we must strengthen ourselves to learn *Sifrei Mussar* every day. - Rav Gamliel Rabinovitch shlit"א,
The Essence of Chinuch pg. 222

STAND TALL, BUILD A SCHOOL

Meilich Katz* had enough. Too many times, it was the same story. Good families moved in, stayed for a couple of years, and then moved out. And being a native from Bailey, he knew that if something wasn't done soon, his town would soon go the way of so many others. Storied history, but no future.

With a plan in mind, he called his good friend, Yoni Vogal. Yoni and Meilich had known each other for years, and though they didn't always agree on what was best for the community, they both agreed they wanted the best for the community.

"Yoni, I think it's time. I think Bailey is ready for a high school."

"Meilich, you know what happened the last time they tried to open one here, don't you?"

"It was premature. The funding wasn't there, and the people weren't behind it. But I'm telling you, we can do it. And what's the other option? People keep leaving town, as there's no high school for their children. We are in a terrible spiral, and if we don't do something now, well, who knows?"

And so it was decided. Forging ahead, Meilich and Yoni contacted various *yeshivos*, to recruit a principal and new *rebbeim*. Other members of the community got behind the idea, volunteering accounting services, or other administrative tasks.

And although there were people who were excited by the prospect of a new school in town, there was much more opposition than they expected. "The city can't support a high school!" "What's wrong with sending the kids out of town?" "You're just doing this so that you can decide what the school, and the community, should look like!"

The accusations flew fast and hard. Some were without merit, and some were indeed cause for concern. But through it all, Meilich stood strong. "Bailey needs a school. Without a school, we will disappear." He repeated it to anyone who would listen, and even to some who wouldn't.

It's been twenty-five years since that groundbreaking decision. Not only did Bailey survive, but it grew. Younger families moved in, knowing this was indeed a place they could raise their children, a place where Torah thrives. Meilich, Yoni, and their wives were honored at the twenty-fifth anniversary, and Meilich received a standing ovation when he stood up to speak.

He spoke with passion and fervor mixed with humor and down-to-earth wisdom. Finishing his speech, he ended with a simple observation. "Twenty-five years ago we were called troublemaking rabble-rousers. Now we are called visionaries. Doing the right thing is not always recognized in its time, but it will be recognized in time."

**Based on a true story, names and places have been changed.*

DID YOU KNOW?

- One should do what's right, despite the ridicule of others. However, one should be careful to avoid altercations.¹
- The most fundamental characteristic needed in *avodas Hashem* is the ability to do what's right despite the opinions of others.²

¹ *Mishnah Berurah* 1:5

² *Tur Orech Chaim* 1:1

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