

# PARSHAT PINCHAS—WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

## SYNOPSIS:

Last week, we read about the story of Balaam, the donkey and the king that would not give up on trying to curse the Israelites. However, this week, we learn very well that the Israelites were plenty capable of cursing themselves. The closing lines of last week's sidra describes the debauchery of the Israelites fornicating with foreign women and sacrificing to foreign gods, culminating in Pinchas—son of Aaron—executing two of the extreme offenders. Pinchas, in his vigilante-ness, is credited with quelling God's wrath for justice, saving the Israelites from annihilation, ending the plague and is rewarded with God's Brit Shalom. The sidra continues with a census to account for those lost to the plague and a rather progressive anecdote regarding Levirate marriage and property law. Joshua bin Nun is publicly raised as Moses' successor and concludes with an in-depth daily sacrificial schedule.

## BRIT SHALOM—A CONCORDANCE EXERCISE:

- “That you will not do us harm, just as we have not molested you but have always dealt kindly with you and sent you away in שלום. From now on, be you blessed of the LORD!” (Gen. 26:29)
- “He continued, “Is he שלום?” They answered, “Yes, he is שלום; and there is his daughter Rachel, coming with the flock.” (Gen. 29:6)
- אֹךְ נֹדַע כִּי שׂוֹר נִגַּח הוּא מִתְמַוֵּל שְׁלֵשׁ וְלֹא יִשְׁמְרֵנוּ בְּעֲלֵיו שְׁלָם יִשְׁלָם שׂוֹר תַּחַת הַשׂוֹר וְהִמַּת יְהִי־לּוֹ: (ס)
  - If, however, it is known that the ox was in the habit of goring, and its owner has failed to guard it, he must **completely restore (pay for)** ox for ox. (Exodus 21:36)
- “I will grant שלום in the land, and you shall lie down untroubled by anyone; I will give the land respite from vicious beasts, and no sword shall cross your land.” (Lev. 26:6)
- Proverbs 3
- While there are dozens upon dozens of examples of the word Shalom in our Tanakh, how would we describe the word Shalom now given these examples? What does that tell us that the Torah is written with a broken “vav” in this instance of שלום?
- Aaron, according to Pirkei Avot, loved peace. So much so that Aaron is accused of stalling/allowing the golden calf incident to take place in order to preserve lives and some semblance of “peace.” Arguably, Pinchas—Aaron's grandson—is doing the same thing here. The question is: is it “ok” to break eggs to make an omelette? \*Jake Mori's conundrum about the railroad tracks\*
- Numbers 25:11-12 specifically states that Moses has to tell Pinchas of God's reward of a Brit Shalom.



## NUMBERS 25:14-15 NAMING THE OFFENDERS: DETAILS.

- Why would the Torah go out of its way to identify these offenders?
  - Cozbi=Kh-Z-B=dishonesty
  - “If Moses can do it why can't I?”
  - The Israelites dwelt in Shittim (Acacias) word play with Shtut (foolishness)
    - This week's Haftara also has interesting word play. God asks Jeremiah what he sees, he replies I see Mikeil Sheked (branch of an almond tree) and God clarifies that this is because God has been shokeid (watchful) in making good on God's word.

## THE CENSUS: BOOKS AND BOOK KEEPING (NUMBERS 26:2-26:65)

- Sefer ספר is the Hebrew word for book
- Lispor לספור is the Hebrew word for to count and מספר מספר is the Hebrew word for number.
- What is the connection between books and counting?
- How does the census end? (26:65)

## THE DAUGHTERS OF Tz'LOPH'CHAD: DAUGHTERS OF THE DARK SHADOW:

- Read 27:1-11
  - 27:3—What is the sin of the father? Why are Joshua and Caleb permitted to enter the land?
  - What is interesting about this “case”? Any lawyers in this room?
    - Inheritance law/marrying within the tribe
    - Levirate marriage
    - Women’s rights
- Moses presides over the high court and hears the most important cases—why is this case juxtaposed with a reminder of Moses’ punishment for striking the rock? What are the systems of Justice?
  - Presiding Shoftim vs. Moses’ personal dialogue with God vs. Urim and Thumim

## GOD LOVES BBQ

- 28:3-4—Two lambs a day; one in the morning one at twilight.
- 28:9-10—Rashi explains there are an additional two offerings on Shabbat.
  - \*Sacrifice Post Temple/Musaf\*
- 28:11—Rosh Hodesh; 28:16—Pesach offering; 28:26—Shavuot; 29:1—Rosh Hashanah; 29:7—Yom Kippur (29:11 makes reference to the extra ram that was sacrificed as a scape goat in sidra Achrei Mot in Lev. 16:9 as to appease Azazel); include sin offering \*animal’s eyes\*
- 29:12—What is the definition of Chag?
  - Biblically, chag only refers to Sukkot, Shavout and Pesach
- 29:13-35
  - What holiday is being celebrated here?
  - How many bulls are sacrificed? 70+1
  - The Hanukkah connection
    - Hillel vs. Shammai

וַיִּקָּם בַּלְעָם בַּבֹּקֶר וַיַּחֲבֹשׁ אֶת־אֲתָנֹהוּ וַיֵּלֶךְ עִם־שָׂרֵי מוֹאָב:

When he arose in the morning, Balaam saddled his ass and departed with the Moabite dignitaries.

Rashi says: we learn from this that the hatred one bears for a person makes one disregard the rule imposed upon him by his exalted position, for he, himself, not a servant, did the saddling.

The Holy One, blessed be He, said: You wicked man! Their ancestor Abraham has already anticipated you in this, as it is said, ([Genesis 22:3](#)) “And Abraham rose up early in the morning and saddled his ass”

\*Akedah\* \*Vayakam is what we were meant to do\* Rashi is asking us to compare and contrast Numbers 22:21-22 and Genesis 22:3—Both get up early in the morning, both saddle their donkeys, both take two servants with them, both are going to make sacrifices at high places. The only difference between the two is that God appoints the high place for the Akedah and God does not sanction the sacrifices of Balaam and the Moabite king and, and now we get to the question, the two stories vary between he-ass [Abraham] and she-ass [Balaam]).

But this does not fully answer the question. To answer the question of why she-ass, I did a concordance search of the Hebrew word and this is what I found.

She-asses are described as assets acquired or owned (Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Job, Yoav’s accounting), two other instances worth noting are the story of the Shunamite when woman requests a she-ass (Elisha revives the dead child) and Zechariah states that the king (messiah) will be riding into Jerusalem on an ass born to a she ass. The final reference could be construed as a reference to the Balaam story in that, when D'vorah is risen as a judge in Israel, she reminds the people of the lack of protection from foreign influence—military and religious—claiming the need for those who, “ride on she-asses” to “declare and chant the gracious acts of God’s deliverance of Israel.” (Judges 5:10-11).

In all, as you pointed out last week, the use of she-ass is special in the sense that there are only 11 instances where She-ass is used in the Tanakh, which makes it significant.