

## Rabbi's Column

Family is pretty important in this week's portion. Not a specific family, but the idea of family, and the idea that everyone counts.

The portion begins by continuing the cliff hanger from last week. You might remember that moments after Balaam had failed to curse the Israelites, the women of the country that had hired him descended upon the camped Israelites, being enticing. Many were enticed, and on the way of getting to know these women better, wound up engaging in acts of worship to the Moabite god. Pinchas, our vigilante hero, saves the day by skewering the Midianite princess who was visibly involved with an Israelite prince. All the guilty are named this week. Pinchas, who is Aaron's grandson, receives God's promise that his descendants will retain the covenant of priesthood forever. A covenant of peace.

The Israelite Prince who was executed was from the tribe of Simeon. Simeon, if you remember, along with his brother Levi, were the ones who killed the inhabitants of the city whose prince had slept with their sister. With this in mind, one possible way to read the text is that the Prince was putting himself in the position of the victim of his grandcestor, hoping in that way to ameliorate his tribe's reputation for violence. Pinchas just hammers in that you can't trust a Levite with sharp objects to avoid using them.

I am not going to claim that it was rational for the Prince to parade his friend before the other leaders. Yet, as she was a Midianite and the others were declared to be Moabite, perhaps she wasn't involved in luring people to idolatry, but was trying to join the Israelites, and the Prince could have been trying to show the leaders that the women could join us, as opposed to us joining them.

God stated that the punishment for the Israelites was forestalled by Pinchas act, who acted upon the snit God was currently in. This, as it were, woke God up from being aggravated. "Do I appear that unreasonable? Does My action even make sense?" So the people remained alive so they could inherit the land. And Pinchas is put in his place.

The generations have been changing, so it is time to figure out whose family is larger, so as to know whose plot of land in Israel will be larger. Like each census before, the counting was done by father's houses, and in general by mentioning the males. One male, now dead, had no sons. His daughters were worried that the family would ignore them, their father would be forgotten, and there would be no connection between them and the Land. So they went to Moses, and God described how inheritance would work from then on - and women would be part of the generational transitions.

The portion ends with Moses letting the rest of the Israelites know what the Levites would need from them in order to have proper celebrations. Even without any land, they are still part of the family and must be taken care of.

Would that the entire world remembered that we are all part of the same family, and we should help take care of each other, so that we can continue to make the world a better place through our life affirming actions.