

Parashat Pinchas 5781, 2021:

*Of Yehoshua and the Moon*

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, Chaya Sarah bat Reb Yechezkel Shraga, Shmuel Yosef ben Reuven, Shayndel bat Mordechai Yehudah, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Moshe ben Itta Golda, Yocheved Dafneh bat Dinah Zehavah, Reuven Shmuel ben Leah, and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Both Parashat Korach and our *parasha* contain an unusual name of the Almighty:

They [Moshe and Aharon] fell on their faces and said, “O G-d, the G-d of the spirits of all flesh (*Elokei haruchot l’kol basar*) if one man sins, shall You be angry with the whole congregation?” (*Sefer Bamidbar* 16:22)

Let the L-rd, the G-d of spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation who will go forth before them and come before them, who will lead them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of the L-rd will not be like sheep without a shepherd.” (*Sefer Bamidbar* 27:16-17, these, and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

In Parashat Korach, Rashi (1040-1105) explains *Elokei haruchot l’kol basar* as, “He Who knows all thoughts...before You all thoughts are revealed,” and in our *parasha*, he suggests that just like Hashem knows the unique nature of each and every individual in the world, so, too, should He appoint a leader who will emulate Him in this regard and thereby be able to tolerate the idiosyncrasies of each member of the Jewish people. While both explanations present the concept of Hashem’s total knowledge of the innermost thoughts of humankind, the second one stresses the notion that Moshe’s forthcoming replacement must also have this quality, albeit, on the human level.

In his Torah commentary, *Maor v'Shemesh*, Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Halevi Epstein (1753-1825) raises a fundamental question regarding Moshe's request concerning the nature of the leader Hashem should appoint following his impending demise:

It is fitting to focus quite clearly upon Moshe's underlying reason for giving advice to the Holy One blessed be He regarding the need to appoint an individual over the congregation. Behold, He, may His Name be blessed, runs all the worlds, therefore, how is it possible for one born of a woman [that is, a mortal being] to give advice to the King of the Universe as to how He ought to lead His congregation? (This, and the following translations my own)

If we are to understand the rationale of Moshe's appeal to the Almighty, Rav Epstein suggests we must focus upon the celebrated midrashic statement found in *Talmud Bavli, Baba Batra 75a*: "The Elders of that generation [who witnessed the transition from Moshe to Yehoshua, Rashi] declared: 'Moshe's face was like the face of the sun, and Yehoshua's face was like the face of the moon.'" In simple terms, this means that Moshe was the earthly source of Torah, whereas Yehoshua, like the moon, reflected the Torah he had learned from Moshe. Rav Epstein maintains that this concept serves as a prologue to the second part of Moshe's request concerning the future leader of the Jewish people, "who will lead them out and bring them in (*asher yatze lifneihem v'asher yavo lifneihem*)." The first Hebrew letters of this phrase have the *gematria* (numerical equivalent) of 87, the exact same numerical value of the Hebrew word, *levanah* (moon). In other words, Moshe requested that the next leader of *klal Yisrael* should be the human equivalent of the moon and, as such, reflect his [Moshe's] Torah, rather than being another sun as he had been.

Rav Epstein asserts that Moshe entreated Hashem to choose a leader of this kind precisely because the Jewish people had complained against him time and time again, even though they recognized his unparalleled status as Hashem's greatest prophet. Ironically, it was Moshe's unique prominence that prevented our nation from properly following him:

But this matter is to be understood in this manner: Based upon the degree of intellectual achievement and holiness that Moshe had achieved, to the point that he had reached heights higher than all other created beings, and that he was the chosen one among all whom Hashem had formed and thereby went up to Heaven itself and acquired the Torah from a place that was exalted and loftier than anything in Creation, ... the members of his generations were unable to [properly] apprehend his intellect...and, therefore, [often] erred in their interpretation of his statements. (This, and the following translations and brackets my own)

For Rav Epstein, since Moshe understood his people so profoundly, he realized that they needed a different kind of leader to replace him: “Someone whose intellect was congruent with theirs, and someone whom they would, therefore, be able to accept. [Crucially], such an individual would allow them to choose the proper manner of serving Hashem based upon their [normative] intellectual capabilities.” In the *pasuk* following Moshe’s request, we find that Hashem concurred with him: “The L-rd said to Moshe, ‘Take for yourself Yehoshua the son of Nun, a man of spirit, and you shall lay your hand upon him.’” (27:18) As *Sefer Yehoshua* later attests, Yehoshua had, indeed, been the perfect choice: “And Yisrael served the L-rd all the days of Yehoshua, and all the days of the Elders that outlived Yehoshua, and who had known all the works of the L-rd, that He had done for Yisrael.” (24:31)

May the time come soon, and in our days, when we will once again have a leader who will be accepted by our entire nation and will teach us how to serve the Almighty with true heartfelt love and devotion. *V’chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom and may Hashem in His infinite mercy remove the pandemic from *klal Yisrael* and all the nations of the world.

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The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

\*\*\* My audio *shiurim* on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpd>

\*\*\* I have posted 164 of [Rabbi Soloveitchik's](#) English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.