

DID THEY EAT STONES?

Parshas Pinchas

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

When Moshe ordains his disciple and successor Joshua and confers upon him of his majesty, as he was commanded to do, "You shall place some of your glory (spirituality) upon him (Bamidbar 27:20), he also instructs him regarding his leadership. However, the Torah reads only "VAYTZAVAIHU", he instructed him (27:23), without specifying the nature of the directive. The Baal Haturim suggests it was regarding the KORBAN TOMID, daily sacrifice, and Torah study, that even during war these two must be meticulously observed. He derives this from the fact that the Mitzvah of KORBAN TOMID follows directly after the SMICHA bestowal upon Joshua. The author also shows a reference to Torah study in the passages of KORBAN TOMID, based on the teaching (Menochos 110a) that study is equivalent to KORBAN.

When Joshua brings the Israelites to the Land of Israel, and is faced with a war, which keeps him busy with actual battle during the day and strategic planning during the night, and so neglects the KORBAN TOMID and Torah study, an angel appears with a sword in his hand to reprimand him. The main emphasis is on his negligence of Torah study, "Now I have come" (Joshua 5:14). From then on Joshua scrupulously keeps his learning schedule at all times (see Radak, *ibid.* Megillah 3a, 3b).

This legacy, bequeathed by Moshe, during the first transmission of Torah leadership, is the cherished principle of Torah study, as the foundation upon which life in the Land of Israel is based. The Halacha of Birchas Hamazon, grace after a meal, requires mention of the inheritance of the Land of Israel even in the Diaspora. For the blessing in the Land of Israel is the source for sustenance throughout the world (see Rashi Devorim 11:12). Thus the second benediction, composed by Joshua (Brochos 48b), quotes the scripture that obligates to recite grace after a meal. The preceding passage, however, reads, "it is a land ... whose stones are iron and from whose mountains you will mine copper" (Devorim 7:9). This is followed by the passage "You will eat and you will be satisfied, and bless Hashem, your G-d, for the good Land that He gave you" (7:10). The connection is bewildering, are we going to eat stones hard as iron?! This astounded the rabbis, who taught "Do not read 'avoneiho' (its stones) but 'boneiho' (its builders), a reference to Torah scholars" (Taanis 4a).

The message is clear. The Torah students who dwell in its wisdom are the real builders of the Land of Israel. In the second grace benediction we thank the Al-mighty "al Toroscho, the Torah that You have taught us". Apparently, it is a reference to Torah studied during the meal, as is praised in Avoth (3:3). It is thus, most appropriate to mention it in the grace since the Torah students are the real builders, the real providers, so that we eat and be satiated.

The writer of this essay hesitates to criticize others, even with whom he vehemently disagrees. However Parshas Pinchas teaches us not to withhold criticism when absolutely necessary. Pinchas, we read in the beginning of the Sidra, was rewarded with eternal Kehuna (priesthood) for an act of vengeance against Zimri. The Zohar (Korach 176a) teaches that Kehuna is related to chesed (kindness). Wherein is the reward "Mida Keneged Mida" (measure for measure), Kehuna, Chesed, for an act of vengeance. The answer is that Pinchas' act of vengeance saved the Jewish people, and that is an act of chesed. "Pinchas ... turned back My wrath from upon the children of Israel, when he zealously avenged My vengeance among them..." (Bamidbar 25:11).

It is therefore deemed appropriate to clearly negate, discredit and refute what has been written by Shlomo Riskin in his syndicated essay (June 11, '10) in which he degrades, dishonors and disgraces our precious Kolel students who persevere assiduously in Torah study under difficult financial circumstances, on meager stipends. This negative impression is communicated when he compares the rebellious Korach to the Kolel yungerman. To quote Riskin, reluctantly: "Korach was a different rebel altogether; he was jealous of the priesthood, the kehunah, of Aaron and is so charged by Moses (16:10). He wished to remain in the sanctified, rarefied, bubble-like kollel (yeshiva) atmosphere of the desert forever, devoid of the responsibility of ever establishing a State with economic, social and military challenges; he loved the manna from heaven and the Divine cloud by day and fire by night which told the people when and where to go. He simply wished to be priest-kohen in an eternal kollel, and is therefore consumed in flames."

We say to Shlomo Riskin: to insult the Kolel is "risking" the "skin" and the Neshomo. "Warm yourself by the fire of the sages, beware of their glowing coal lest you be burnt" (Avoth 2:15). The bread you eat is in their zechus (merit). "Boneiho... V'ochalto". These Kolel fellows are the real builders of the Land of Israel.

