

will he not do? God says Moshe will die as Aaron his brother did. What do you think is meant by that comparison?

5) The Parasha ends with the sacrifices for the various holidays. (The Maftir readings on holidays come from here.) Compare the sacrifices of Pesach (28:17-24) and Succot (28:12-34), the 2 full-week holidays. What have you noticed? What explanation can you offer for this phenomenon?



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The weekly Haftarah Commentary
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TORAH SPARKS

Parashat Pinchas

July 9-15, 2017 • 21 Tammuz 5777

Annual (Numbers 25:10-30:1): Etz Hayim p. 918-936; Hertz p. 686-698
Triennial (Numbers 25:10-26:51): Etz Hayim p. 918-924; Hertz p. 686-690
Haftarah (Jeremiah 1:2-2:3): Etz Hayim p. 968-971; Hertz p. 710-713

Pinchas, Vampires and Immortality

Dr. Joshua Kulp, Rosh Yeshiva, Talmud teacher, and a founder of the Conservative Yeshiva

As I write this d'var Torah, I am reading a modern re-telling of the vampire myth called *The Historian* (by Elizabeth Kostova). Vampires are to an extent immortal, and can only be killed by a stake to the heart or extreme exposure to light. I will admit to a certain fascination with the notion of immortality and I will even admit to having read Anne Rice's campy Vampire Lestat series when I was younger.

There are several biblical characters to whom ancient Jews ascribed immortality. One of them is Pinchas, the eponymous hero of our parsha. After having killed the Israelite Zimri and the Midianite Cozbi for fornicating, God's promises Pinchas, "It shall be for him and his descendants after him a pact of priesthood **for all time**, because he took impassioned action for his God, *vachaper* and atoned (or 'will atone') for the Israelites" (Numbers 25:13). The strange thing about this verse is that Pinchas was already a priest and the priesthood descends genealogically. Pinchas seems to be receiving an eternal reward that was already his in the first place!

There are hints in the Bible that Pinchas lived an extraordinarily long life. Pinchas is still alive when the tribes fight a war against the Benjaminites in Judges 20:27-28, “The Israelites inquired of the LORD (for the Ark of God’s Covenant was there in those days, **and Phinehas son of Eleazar son of Aaron the priest ministered before Him in those days**.)” Post-biblical authors go a step further and read Pinchas’s reward as not only an extraordinarily long life, but immortality, combining him with another biblical character, Elijah, who according to tradition, was also immortal (and both of whom share a passion for zealotry). Such a theme is found in the writings of a variety of authors, including Hellenistic Jewish authors such as Pseudo-Philo, Aramaic Targumim and various rabbinic sources.

But why is immortality such a great reward? What is the purpose of living forever? Would one want such a gift? Indeed, in the vampire novels I am so often drawn to, immortality becomes a sort of punishment. The vampire’s contemporaries all die, his/her memories blend into one another, the vampire grows exceedingly weary of life, and wishes to die. Indeed, I think if most of us were to ponder deeply the notion that we would live forever, even if our lives were healthy, we would not desire such a gift.

But this is because vampire literature is hedonistic—the vampire lives forever, not for the greater good of humanity, but simply because s/he has that ability. In contrast, in Jewish imagination, individual immortality serves the world. Picking up on the fact that *vachaper* in Numbers 25:13 can be read “will atone” and not just “atoned,” Sifrei Numbers 113 states that Pinchas will eternally make atonement for Israel, until the end of days. Targum Yonatan says that Pinchas will announce the redemption, just as does Elijah. Other immortal figures such as Serach bat Asher and Enoch also serve the world through their immortality.

Immortality is, I believe, a fascinating form of speculative fiction because it forces us to ask what humanity’s role in the world is. If human existence is hedonistic, then living forever would become torturous. Once every possibility has been experienced multiple times, living would become simply exhausting. But if the point of eternal life is directed outward, towards serving the mortals who continue to be born and die, then immortality becomes a little more godly. That is the eternal reward that tradition accords Pinchas.

A Vort for Parashat Pinchas

Rabbi Daniel Goldfarb, Coordinator, Torah Sparks

Moses asks God to appoint as his successor one “who will go out and come in before them, and who will take them out and bring them in” (Num 27:17). The *Avnei Ezel* (attributed to Alexander Zusia Friedman, author of *Mayana shel Torah*/Wellspring of Torah, 1897 – 1943, Poland, killed by the Nazis) said that a true leader goes ahead, drawing the people up to him, rather than lowering himself to their level and yielding to their wishes, to curry favor. Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Alter (the *Hiddushei HaRim*, 1798–1866, founder of the Ger Hasidic dynasty Poland), said that such a leader will “take them out” of their lowly state and “bring them in” to a higher level of *kedusha*. Would that we had leaders like that today!

Table Talk

Vered Hollander-Goldfarb, CY Faculty

Our Parasha brings to a close the failure at Ba’al Peor and the zealotry of Pinchas. Now we prepare to enter the Land of Israel, and receive one more chapter of sacrifices – this time the special communal additions for Chagim (holidays).

- 1) Pinchas stopped God’s anger by killing 2 of the offending people (story in 25:1-9). Their names and positions are given here (25:14-15). Why do you think that the Torah shared this personal information about them?
- 2) The second census in the book of Bamidbar (26:1-51) counts males from age 20 who could join the army. As we are now in the 40th year, on the threshold of Eretz Yisrael, there is another significance for this census (26:52-56). What is it? How will the numbers in the census effect this reason?
- 3) One group that was overlooked in the discussion about land allocation is represented by a group in 27:1-11. Who are they and what do they want? Why do they care? (Give their explanation and your ideas.) What new law is learnt from this case?
- 4) Now that entering the land is becoming a reality, we begin our parting from Moshe (27:12-14). What will Moshe get to do before dying? What