

PARENTING *in the* PARSHA

פינחס Lineage

פינחס בן אלעזר בן אהרן הכהן השיב את חמתי מעל בני ישראל בקנאו את קנאתי בתוכם ולא כליתי את בני ישראל בקנאתי:

“Phinehas, son of Eleazar son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the Israelites by displaying among them his passion for Me, so that I did not wipe out the Israelite people in My passion.

פינחס בן אלעזר בן אהרן הכהן. לפי שהיו הבטים מביאים אותו הראייתם בן פוטי זה שפטים אבי אמו עגלים לע"ז וקרג

ישיא שבט מישראל? לפיכך בא הכתוב ויחסו אחר אהרן

because the tribes spoke disparagingly of him, saying, “Have you seen this grandson of Puti the father of) calves for idolatrous sacrifices (see [Exodus 6:25](#) that Eleazar whose mother used to fatten (father had married a daughter of Putiel who is identified with Jethro; see Rashi on that verse and [Exodus 18:1](#)), and he has dared to slay a prince of one of Israel’s tribes!”, therefore Scripture comes and connects his genealogy with Aaron

-Rashi

“Don’t tell me who your grandfather is, tell me who you are”

-Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm

Yichus. It is a source of great pride for some families. It is a source of quiet discomfort for others. It should be neither, yet it should be both. Allow me to explain.

It has been said, wisely, that *Yichus* can be compared to a bunch of zeros. Alone, it is worthless. Place a one in front of it, and it is enormous. Those who are privileged to descend from Jewish royalty and greatness cannot rest on their laurels, believing that they have somehow made it simply because of where they come from. Quite the opposite, those who descend from the greats have a specific responsibility to live up to the legacy of their predecessors.

What about the plain folk, the ones who cannot claim descent from every great *rebbe* or *posek* of the last few centuries? How should they view themselves and their families in light of their lack of *yichus*? The answer, quite simply, is they should see themselves as the source of *yichus* for their children and their grandchildren.

There is an old story told in this vein of two men engaged in conversation, one who is not a model of Torah Judaism, but speaks constantly of his *yichus* and whom he is descended from. The other is exemplary and meticulous in his observance of *mitzvos*, but lacks the lineage of his boastful friend. Tired of hearing the constant chatter from his fellow about his *yichus*, the second fellow turns to the first and says the following: “The difference between you and me is that your *yichus* ends with you, while mine begins with me.”

The opening of *parashas* Pinchas is all about *yichus*, specifically about choosing what *yichus* you will follow. Pinchas is the scion of greatness, the son of the recently installed, new *kohen gadol*, grandson of the original *Kohen gadol*, the great Aharon Hakohen. But, Pinchas also descends from ignominy. His maternal grandfather had a distinguished career fattening calves to be used for idolatry, hardly the stuff great *yichus* is made of.

Pinchas came to a fork in the road of his life at *shittim*. He could shy away from greatness, too afraid that he will be belittled and judged unfavorably as the grandson of Yisro, or he could rise to the occasion and take his rightful place as heir to the dynasty of the family of Aharon. At that fateful moment, Pinchas decided to place the one in front of the bunch of zeros that his father and grandfather had handed him. He made himself deserving to claim the *yichus* of his illustrious family, and at that moment, he earned his place as a *Kohen*. The rabble in the background may have groused and belittled Pinchas for his lack of *yichus* on his mother’s side, but the Torah itself testifies that Pinchas made himself into a *meyuchas* by his actions and deeds.

For parents, it is important to educate children to know where they come from and to take pride in the greatness of their predecessors. But, it is equally important to teach the children to not be arrogant, complacent, or smug because of their ancestry. We must let our children know that their *yichus* is only meaningful if they live up to the legacy.

Likewise, for parents who cannot trace their history back to the greats of the past, they need to educate their children to believe that they can grow to become the greats of their descendants’ past. Our children deserve to be raised with an awareness of the bold statement in the *gemara* in Yoma (72b). There, the *gemara* tells us that there are three crowns to be had in Jewish society. The crowns of *kahuna* and *malchus* are hereditary in nature and are already spoken for by the families of Aharon and Dovid. But, the greatest crown of all, the crown of Torah, is open for all takers. Anyone can have the greatest *yichus* in the world, him or herself.

Good Shabbos,
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Principal