

Vassar Temple Torah Study: Pinchas
2nd Triennial Cycle (Numbers 26:52-28:15)
Rabbi Leah R. Berkowitz
July 11, 2015

Opening Prayer--Blessing before the Study of Torah:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְעֲסוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה.

Transliteration: Baruch atah Adonai eloheynu melech ha-olam a-sher kid-shanu b'mitz-votav vitzi-vanu la-asok b-divray torah

English: Blessed are You, Eternal our God, Ruler of the Universe, who sanctifies us with Your Mitzvot and commands us to engage in the study of Torah.

“When you understand humility (anavah) in terms of the space you occupy, it’s important to clarify that we are not all meant to occupy the same amount of space. Some people appropriately occupy a lot of space, as would be the case for a leader—think of Moses...But if a leader laid claim to even more space than was appropriate, they would be Pharaoh. And ... a leader who shrinks from his responsibilities—that is, takes up less space than appropriate—can also create disastrous consequences”

-Alan Morinis, *Everyday Holiness*, p. 45, 52.

Bamidbar Rabbah 21:10. THEN DREW NEAR THE DAUGHTERS OF ZELOPHEHAD (XXVII, 1). In that generation the women built up the fences which the men broke down. Thus you find that Aaron told them: *Break off the golden rings, which are in the ears of your wives* (Ex. XXXII, 2), but the women refused and checked their husbands; as is proved by the fact that it says, *And all the people broke off the golden rings which were in their ears* (ib. 3), the women not participating with them in making the Calf. It was the same in the case of the spies, who uttered an evil report: *And the men... when they returned, made all the congregation to murmur against him* (Num. XIV, 36), and against this congregation the decree [not to enter the Land] was issued, because they had said: *We are not able to go up* (ib XIII, 31). The women, however, were not with them in their counsel, as may be inferred from the fact that it is written in an earlier passage of our section, *For the Eternal had said of them: They shall surely die in the wilderness. And there was not left a man of them, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh* (ib. XXVI, 65). Thus the text speaks of a man but not of a woman. This was because the men had been unwilling to enter the Land. The women, however, drew near to ask for an inheritance in the Land. Consequently the present section was written down next to that dealing with the death of the generation of the wilderness, for it was there that the men broke down the fences and the women built them up.

Bamidbar Rabbah 21: 11. Another exposition of the text, THEN DREW NEAR THE DAUGHTERS OF ZELOPHEHAD, etc. (XXVII, 1). It was a distinction to them as well as to their father; it was a distinction also to Machir as well as to Joseph, that such women issued from them. They were wise and righteous women. What shows their wisdom? They spoke at the appropriate moment, for Moses was engaged upon the subject of inheritances, saying: *Unto these the land shall be divided* (Num. XXVI, 53). They said to him: *If we have the status of a son let us inherit like a son; if not, let our mother perform the levirate marriage.* Straightway, **MOSES BROUGHT THEIR CAUSE BEFORE THE LORD** (XXVII, 5). They were righteous inasmuch as they married none but such as were worthy of them. Why did the Holy One, blessed be G-d, introduce them to Moses at the end of his career? In order that Moses might not plume himself on having separated from his wife for forty

years. The Holy One, blessed be G-d, informed him through these [that he had no grounds for such a feeling], saying: Here are women who have not been commanded [to refrain from marital intercourse] and yet only married such as were worthy of them.

Babylonian Talmud Hullin 60b: R. Simeon b. Pazzi pointed out a contradiction [between verses]. One verse says: *And God made the two great lights* (Gen. 1:16), and immediately the verse continues: *The greater light . . . and the lesser light* (Gen. 1:16). The moon said unto the Holy One, blessed be God, 'Sovereign of the Universe! Is it possible for two kings to wear one crown'? He answered: 'Go then and make thyself smaller'. 'Sovereign of the Universe!' cried the moon, 'Because I have suggested that which is proper must I then make myself smaller'? He replied: 'Go and thou wilt rule by day and by night'. 'But what is the value of this?' cried the moon; 'Of what use is a lamp in broad daylight'? He replied: 'Go. Israel shall reckon by thee the days and the years'. 'But it is impossible', said the moon, 'to do without the sun for the reckoning of the seasons, as it is written: *And let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years*' (Gen. 1:14). 'Go. The righteous shall be named after thee as we find, Jacob the Small (Amos 7:2), Samuel the Small (a Tannaitic rabbi known for his humility), David the Small' (I Sam 17:14), On seeing that it would not be consoled the Holy One, blessed be G-d, said: 'Bring an atonement for Me for making the moon smaller'. This is what was meant by R. Simeon b. Lakish when he declared: Why is it that the he-goat offered on the new moon is distinguished in that there is written concerning it unto the Eternal? (Num. 28:15). Because the Holy One, blessed be G-d, said: Let this he-goat be an atonement for Me for making the moon smaller.

"Did the sages here picture G-d apologizing for all the unfairness of life—to people who are born less healthy, gifted, or fortunate than others? Given the traditional identification of Rosh Hodesh as a women's festival, did the sages imagine G-d expressing regret to women for having a less prominent role than men for so much of history?" --*Etz Chayim*, 931.

Closing Prayer:

For our teachers and they students,
and the students of the students,
we ask for peace and lovingkindness,
and let us say, Amen.

And for those who study Torah
here and everywhere,
may they be blessed with all they need,
and let us say, Amen.

We ask for peace and lovingkindness,
and let us say, Amen.