

# A Sign the End is Near?

By Rabbi Aron Moss

## Question:

I have a question for you ..... it's a little trivial but here goes anyway....

A non-Jewish colleague refuses to say 'Bless-you' after I sneeze. He says it's because I am Jewish. Where did the 'bless you' ritual originate from and is it purely a Christian thing? What is the Jewish equivalent?

## Answer:

Your friend may have a point. The bless you response to a sneeze was enacted by one of the popes during the bubonic plague. So it definitely has non-Jewish whiff about it.

But long before that, Jews blessed each other upon sneezing. The Talmud records that in the earlier generations, people didn't get sick before they died. They simply sneezed and their souls left their bodies. So it was customary to wish a sneezer "To Life!" for fear that their sneeze was a herald of death.

Things changed in the times of our forefather Jacob. He prayed that one should rather get sick some time before dying, in order to have a little warning and time to prepare for leaving this world. His request was granted, and so sneezing alone was no longer a sure sign of impending death. But it still could be a symptom of illness, so the custom arose to wish a sneezer good health - Assuta in Aramaic, Tzu gezunt in Yiddish, or Labriyut in Hebrew.

Fascinatingly, one source says that after being blessed with health, the sneezer himself should respond to the one who blessed him "Bless

you!" (Baruch tihyeh in Hebrew).

Another interesting note: the sages taught that one does not respond to a sneeze while in the middle of studying Torah. Torah study is too holy to be interrupted, and anyway its power will protect the sneezer from harm. Also, a sneeze during prayer is a good sign, that your prayer will bring relief just like your sneeze did.

Indeed these days most people survive a sneeze without any major consequences. But that doesn't mean we should no longer wish each other good health.

Words have power. The more we bless each other the better. A sneeze is as good an excuse as any to bless someone.

## Live & Laugh

The phone rings at FBI headquarters. "Hello?"

"Hello, is this the FBI?" "Yes. What do you want?"

"I'm calling to report my neighbor Tom. He is hiding drugs in his firewood." "This will be noted."

Next day, the FBI comes over to Tom's house. They search the shed where the firewood is kept, break every piece of wood, find no drugs, shout angrily at Tom and leave.

The phone rings at Tom's house. "Hey, Tom! Did the FBI come?" "Yeah!" "Did they chop your firewood?" "Yeah they did."

"Okay, now it's your turn to call. I need my garden plowed."

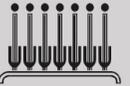
## Calendar

*Shabbos Mevorchim Menachem Av  
Molad: Thursday 19:32 & 4 Chalakim*

- ◆ Shacharis: 9:00am
- ◆ Communal Brocha in the Seeff Hall
- ◆ Mincha & Shalosh Seudos: 5:00pm
- ◆ Shabbos Ends: 6:10pm
- ◆ Weekday Mincha: 5:25pm

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# Good Shabbos SYDENHAM!



23 July 2022

Pinchas

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## The Female Estate

By Chana Weisberg

You are a manager at your work place. From your experience and expertise, you are certain that your strategy is the right way to take to deal with a particular problem that threatens your team's efficiency. You are being confronted by several of your employees, however, who challenge your policy. Officially, you are their superior and they need to concede to you.

How do you handle the situation? Do you use your rank and order them to do things as you have outlined? Do you educate them on your position, convincing them why this is the better approach? Or do you sit down with them to listen to their position and solicit advice from others, being open to the possibility that your subordinates might be correct?

The daughters of Tzelafchad—Machlah, Choglah, Milkah, and Tirtzah—stood before Moses and the entire congregation saying, "Our father died in the desert, but he was not in the assembly that banded together against G-d in Korach's assembly, and he had no sons. Why should our father's name be eliminated from his family because he had no son? Give us a portion along with our father's brothers."

So Moses brought their case before G-d.

G-d spoke to Moses, saying: "Tzelafchad's daughters speak justly. You shall certainly give them a portion of inheritance . . .

"Speak to the children of Israel saying: If a man dies and has no son, you shall transfer his in-

heritance to his daughter." (Numbers 27:1-8)

Every episode in the Torah teaches an everlasting spiritual lesson. The Kabbalistic masters understood this law of inheritance as a metaphorical reflection of the spiritual roles of men and women.

The "conquest of the land" was not a command for the generation of the wilderness alone. Each of us is enjoined to "conquer the land"—to gain mastery of our physical world and transform it into a proper and holy home for G-d.

The nature of the physical is that it is resistant and hostile to G-dliness, holiness, and spirituality. The way to "conquer the land" has traditionally been to battle, subjugate, and uproot the darkness and negativity (whether by battling evil people or regimes, or by fighting value systems that are antithetical to the morality of the Torah). We "battle" by suppressing the materialistic nature of our world and imposing on it a higher purpose and function.

But there is another method of transforming our world into a G-dly home: by cultivating and exposing the inherent positive elements within creation. In this mode, we are not working in the traditional, linear method of imposing and overcoming, but rather in the more inner and pervasive manner of raising and elevating our reality to make it more G-dly.

These two methods, in a nutshell, reflect the masculine and feminine modes of spiritual endeavor. We employ the "masculine" mode

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when we conquer, subjugate, or overcome. We employ the “feminine” approach when we cultivate, nurture, and bring out the inner qualities. (This is not to say that every man will always use the masculine mode and every woman the feminine, but these are the masculine and feminine energies within creation.)

Both roles are vital for transforming our world into a G-dly one. But from the beginning of time, the male role was traditionally perceived as superior and more effective. And for a time, that role was the vital one. When evil abounds, you need to fight it aggressively and head-on.

But there comes a point when humankind is ready to make a transition—from authority to dialogue, from dominance to persuasion, from control to nurture.

The daughters of Tzelaḥchad understood this reality. They realized that there would come a time and a place when “conquering and settling the land” would not be an exclusively masculine endeavour. Not all conquests are achieved by overpowering one’s adversary. There is a feminine way to transform the materiality of our lives into a “holy land.”

G-d agreed with their perception.

G-d instructed: “If a man has no son, you shall pass his inheritance on to his daughter.” The Kabbalistic masters understood this to mean that at times the qualities of the “son,” the masculine, aggressive, and combative nature, are better replaced by those of the “daughter,” the passive, compassionate, non-confrontational side.

Humanity will reach a time when the feminine qualities of receptiveness, nurturance, and empathy will be valued and vindicated for their equal, if not more effective, role of changing the very nature and hostility of “the land” and transforming it into a home for G-d.

The Chassidic masters explain that each of the forty-two legs of the journey from Egypt to the Holy Land reflects another generation and stage in our world history. The incident of the

daughters of Tzelaḥchad occurred on the last stop of this journey. It represents the end of our cosmic journey, right before our ultimate conquest of the Land, in the messianic age.

From the time of our patriarchs, there have been women who displayed spiritual qualities that their husbands (who were themselves great leaders of Israel) could not attain. These were individuals who tasted the messianic era in their time, when the feminine values will rise above the masculine.

The generation of the desert was also exposed to this messianic reality when the women repaired what the men broke down by refusing to participate in the Golden Calf and by refusing to listen to the negative counsel of the spies.

The daughters of Tzelaḥchad petitioned to receive an inheritance, when the men had been unwilling to enter the Land.

The great Kabbalist Rabbi Isaac Luria, the Arizal, explains (Shaar Hagilgulim) that the generation of the final redemption is a reincarnation of the souls of those who were freed from Egypt. Their strong feminine values will be mirrored in the last leg of our history, causing and heralding the ultimate redemption, when the feminine role will be cherished.

## Parsha Pointers

*Artscroll pg 877  
Living Torah pg 799*

Aaron’s grandson Pinchas is rewarded for his act of zealotry in killing the Simeonite prince Zimri and the Midianite princess who was his paramour: G-d grants him a covenant of peace and the priesthood.

A census of the people counts 601,730 men between the ages of twenty and sixty. Moses is instructed on how the Land is to be divided by lottery among the tribes and families of Israel.

The five daughters of Tzelaḥchad petitioned Moses that they be granted the portion of the land belonging to their father, who died without sons; G-d accepts their claim

and incorporates it into the Torah’s laws of inheritance.

Moses empowers Joshua to succeed him and lead the people into the Land of Israel.

The Parshah concludes with a detailed list of the daily offerings, and the additional offerings brought on Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh (first of the month), and the festivals of Passover, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot and Shemini Atzeret.

## The Road to Peace

*By Dr. Tali Loewenthal*

We the Jewish people want peace; we believe that peace is one of the greatest goals in life.

The Sages tell us that the Torah was given in order to bring peace into the world. The concept peace means, of course, a pleasant and positive atmosphere, where there is nothing harsh. And yet the concept of the “covenant of peace,” which we find in this week’s Torah reading, was a reward for Pinchas, the grandson of Aaron, following his forceful action at the end of the previous week’s reading.

There we read that a Shimonite prince was publicly cohabiting with a gentile woman. Moses and Aaron were weeping, they felt powerless, but Pinchas took action. He was a strong man, a zealot. But does that action express the virtue of peace? Yet G-d says that in reward for his action “I give him My covenant of Peace.”

The Sages tell us that Pinchas lived very long and was the same person whom we meet in the Book of Kings, named Elijah, who is the subject of this week’s haftorah.

In the haftorah, he is also seen as a zealot. He sees the moral and spiritual weakness of the Jewish people of his time and is deeply upset about it. He travels through the desert back to Mount Sinai where the Torah was given, as if to meet more directly with the Divine, and he declares that the Jewish people are not keeping their Covenant with G-d.

On the one hand, Pinchas or Elijah was a critic,

who could see the negative aspects of people’s behavior and tried to take action against them, as in the case of Pinchas or as in Elijah’s contest with the Priests of Baal on Mount Carmel.

On the other hand, G-d gives him the Covenant of Peace, which implies seeing people in a positive way. The Torah also says that Pinchas is given the role of being a kohen (priest). The kohen is described as a man of kindness, like Aaron, the first kohen, who saw the good in everyone.

Similarly in the case of Elijah. The Sages tell us that because Elijah complained that the Jewish people are not keeping their Covenant, for all time he is present at every Brit Milah, when a Jewish boy enters the Covenant of Circumcision. He is able to see that indeed the Jewish people are keeping the Covenant. Hence at a Brit Milah a chair is set for Elijah the Prophet.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe comments that, like Pinchas and Elijah, we have to be able to combine two contrary aspects. On the one hand, to be able to act firmly when necessary, to put right that which is wrong, or to protect from danger.

On the other, to be able to see the goodness in a person, his or her potential, their positive achievements. A further step is when these two approaches are combined: by seeing the goodness in a person, one helps them to put right that which needs correction.

The two features of Pinchas and Elijah respectively, become one.

This is the road to genuine peace.

Hence the Sages tell us that Elijah will usher in the Redemption, the time of ultimate peace, in which everything negative will be transformed to good.

Then the enemy of every kind – in Hebrew, *oyev* – will be transformed to *ohev*, friend. Then indeed there will be peace...