**LIVING IN THE MOMENT**Based on a sicha from Shabbos Parshas Pinchas 5751

A Joke to Begin With…

A group of religious tourists joined a guided tour of Israel.

The guide, who wanted to impress his company of listeners, made a point to emphasize the spiritual qualities of Eretz Yisrael. He showed them ancient mikvahs and batei medrash, holy gravesites, and a variety of sacred artifacts.

When they passed the town of Givat Shmuel, right outside of Bnei Brak, he said to the group, “We are now approaching the town of Givat Shmuel. The town is named after the Prophet Shmuel who is buried nearby.”

A short while later, as the bus was approaching Yerushalayim, it passed by an Arab village called Nabi Samuil. The guide again announced enthusiastically, “This place is called Nabi Samuil because this is the burial place of none other than Shmuel HaNavi.”

One of the tourists who was keeping track asked, “Didn’t you tell us that Shmuel HaNavi was buried near Givat Shmuel, just outside of Bnei Brak?”

Without skipping a beat, the tour guide said confidently: “I’m very surprised at you. Don’t you know that in Tanach we have the book of Shmuel I and Shmuel II?”

The moral: A tour guide knows that his job is show business, not science. Every site has a story of its own, independent of any other place…

Parshas Pinchas represents a crucial stage in the process of the Jewish People entering the Land of Israel. Significant portions of the parsha discuss the conquering, apportionment, and inheriting of the Promised Land.

The apportionment of Eretz Yisroel by tribe and family was most unique; it included an authentic combination of rationale (“the larger tribe shall receive a large inheritance”) and Divine involvement. Two boxes were prepared: one containing slips bearing the names of the 12 tribes of Israel (Reuven, Shimon, etc.), and another with twelve more slips with the names of regions in Eretz Yisrael (Acco, Yerushalayim, etc.). Each time the name of a tribe was removed from the first box, a slip bearing the name of a region was removed from the second box. This lottery determined which tribe received which region.

However, there was another element: To make certain that the results of this lottery were acceptable to all without the slightest hesitation, *“ruach ha’kodesh”* and the *“Urim V’Tumim” confirmed the results.* The kohen gadol, Elazar ben Aharon, would announce in advance what the lottery results would be. When the results matched up with the prophetic predictions, this proved beyond all reasonable doubt that the results were Divinely inspired without the involvement of any earthly being.

And if that’s not enough for you, just read the following Midrash (Tanchuma, Pinchas 6):

“The lot itself would cry out at the time that it was drawn, ‘I am the lot of such-and-such a tribe; I have been drawn for such-and-such a place.’ And from where [do we know] that the lot speaks? As it is stated, ‘By the mouth of (according to) the lot.’”

Have you ever heard of a sweepstakes ticket that talked? Probably not – except in the case of apportioning Eretz Yisrael!

However, this brings a few questions to mind: What is the reason for this unusual miracle? Weren’t the “Ruach Ha’kodesh” and the *“Urim V’Tumim”* of Elazar HaKohen enough? There is a well-known saying of the RaN (Rabbi Nissim of Girona) that G-d does not perform miracles in vain. What exactly was the need here?

The Rebbe explains a fascinating concept that can teach us about Avodas Hashem today, on the eve of the Redemption. G-d commanded to Moshe Rabbeinu (Bamidbar 26:55): “Only through lot shall the Land be apportioned.” Dividing Eretz Yisrael must be done only by lot, without interference by any outside forces, no matter how sacred.

If Ruach Ha’kodesh would verify the validity of the lot, and publicizing its results would be done by other means, natural or otherwise, that would indicate that the lot itself was insufficient. The lot for apportioning Eretz Yisrael was meant to be one of complete perfection, down to the last detail. Even the most outwardly insignificant had to be done totally and solely by the lot itself!

That’s why the lot itself spoke and announced the outcomes!

However, it’s still hard to accept this explanation. For if the lot was a mitzvah with a purpose, something important in its own right, we could agree to that fact. Yet, it seems that the exact opposite is the case. The lot was only a tool; a means to designate the various portions of Eretz Yisroel. Apparently, it had no essential purpose unto itself; rather, it was merely chosen by G-d as the desired method for dividing the Land of Israel. Thus, at the moment the land portions were apportioned by lot, this represented the ultimate fulfillment of G-d’s command, and there is no room for any superfluous “miracles.”

So what’s this all about?

The answer is that when we’re talking about a mitzvah from Hashem – there is no essential difference between the means and the end!

A mitzvah is Hashem’s will, and would He have wanted that means to be unnecessary for fulfilling the end, it just wouldn’t be there. If it still is, then that means it *does* have value and significance unto itself.

Each has its own measure of importance and validity. The general principle is that all matters of Torah and holiness, even if they constitute nothing but a *method* to achieve some other purpose, have a unique status and significance. They have their own kind of objective. Therefore, while the lot was only the means to apportion the Holy Land, nevertheless, if it comes as a commandment from Hashem, the means itself was an end!

As a result, the lot had to “cry out”! Even when it came to verifying and publicizing the results, down to the very last detail – everything was done exclusively by the lot itself.

There’s a Chassidic saying: “Chabad demands *p’nimiyus*.” The word *p’nimiyus* means inwardness. Being a *“p’nimi”* means not doing things superficially, just to finish the task and move on, making a check on the “to-do” list. It means immersing our whole being into the matter at hand and investing all our strength toward its fulfillment.

Someone who is *“p’nimi”* makes no distinction between the means and the objective, between a preparatory action and an action that is a goal in its own merit. The truth is that it makes no difference. If you are currently involved with preparing for something, do it perfectly, so that the preparation will befit the stage that follows. Therefore, we must not belittle the preparations and think about “what comes next.” On the contrary, we must forget everything else and invest all our efforts in the current mission with full force.

Similarly, we find in connection with the True and Complete Redemption. “Living Geula” is not an imaginary way of thinking about some magical and perfect existence that will come sooner or later. Preparing for the Redemption is not a means of escaping from the hardships of day-to-day life for a world of paradise.

We sometimes live by a flawed perception, which causes us to run from one concept to another, from one place to another. We are not “running” from the exile to the Redemption; we are bringing the Redemption!

How? By living now, at every waking moment, a life of truth, fullness, and meaning. The Geulah, by its very nature, means truth and perfection. We must start living, here and now, according to this line of thinking, a Geula’dike (redemptive) way of life – by bringing every aspect of our lives to its ultimate perfection and reality! Whenever and wherever we can, we must utilize every element and every moment of our existence to the fullest. This means carrying out our *avoda* with the utmost seriousness and sincerity regardless of the prevailing circumstances. A proper davening for its own sake (not just turning the pages); learning Chitas and Rambam (not just mumbling the words); helping others (not just to get rid of them), and the list goes on.

To Conclude with a Story

We will conclude with a story told by the Rebbe as an explanation of the term *“p’nimi”*:

Once, during the farbrengen of Yud-Tes Kislev 5664, the yeshiva students began singing a certain niggun as a form of introduction to the Rebbe Rashab giving over a ma’amer. The Rebbe felt that they were rushing through the singing of the niggun to get to the ma’amer.

This inappropriate conduct on the students’ part produced some spiritual assets. The Rebbe Rashab devoted an entire landmark talk on the subject, and he said: “In general, this is an essential principle: Wherever one is – he should be there truly … whenever I deal with this – I have to be here.” ■ **Good Shabbos!**