Jewish Tribune – Pinchos

**Nepotism**

And the winner of this year’s national nepotism award goes to ….

My son. For the third year running.

Nepotism, is defined as the practice among those with power or influence of favouring relatives or friends. It could apply to awards (as above), or by giving them jobs (as below).

Interviewer: What are your thoughts about nepotism in a workplace environment.

Candidate: Well, that’s a really good question, Dad.

But strangely enough, it appears in this week’s parsha.

Hashem tells Moshe Rabbeinu to climb the mountain from where he would see the Promised Land before he dies. Despite receiving the devastating news that he will not enter the land, Moshe Rabbeinu’s instinctive reaction is to ask Hashem to appoint a worthy leader to succeed him.

Rashi notes the praiseworthy action:

**להודיע שבחן של צדיקים שכשנפטרין מן העולם מניחין צרכן ועוסקין בצרכי צבור**

(The possuk comes) to let us know the virtues of the righteous, for when they are about to take leave of the world, they disregard their own needs and occupy themselves with the needs of the community.

The trouble is, Rashi on the very next possuk doesn’t seem to fit.

The daughters of Tzelophchad approached Moshe and told him that their father had died leaving behind only daughters. They requested to receive their father’s portion in Eretz Yisroel. Moshe Rabbeinu relayed their request to Hashem.

Hashem agrees to the request of the daughters of Tzelophchad and instructs Moshe all the laws of inheritance. Included in these laws is a daughter’s right to her father’s estate if he does not leave any sons.

Rashi states:

**כיון ששמע משה שאמר לו המקום תן נחלת צלפחד לבנותיו אמר הגיע שעה שאתבע צרכי שיירשו בני את גדולתי. אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא לא כך עלתה במחשבה לפני, כדאי הוא יהושע ליטול שכר שמושו שלא מש מתוך האהל**

When Moshe heard that Hashem told him to give Tzelophchad’s inheritance to his daughters, he said “It is time to ask for my own needs, that my son should inherit my high position.” HKBH said to him: “That is not my intention, for Yehoshua deserves to be rewarded for his service, because he did not depart from (Moshe’s) tent.

This seems totally at odds with the previous Rashi. Is Moshe displaying wonderful selflessness by putting Klal Yisroel first or is he demonstrating nepotism?

Some explain that the source of the first Rashi is the Sifri. Rav Hillel’s peirush on Sifri explains that Moshe’s first concern upon hearing that he would not enter Eretz Yisroel was that someone should take his place. Only then does he focus on his children. This initial reaction shows his extreme selflessness.

I once heard a different and very creative and fascinating explanation.

Moshe Rabbeinu was setting a precedent. He knew that his children were not worthy of becoming leaders after him. He knew the answer would be no and simply wanted to put on record that greatness comes not from yichus but through hard work and dedication. The second request was also therefore for the benefit of Klal Yisroel. Remarkable.

My family recently had the zechus of hosting a choshuv Maggid Shiur from Yerushalayim who happens to be a grandson of Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky ztl. I asked him if he knew his grandfather well. He told me that he lived in his house for a whole year, in the year before his own bar mitzva.

He explained that his family lived in Philadelphia and his father, Rav Shmuel Kamenetsky (he should have a refua shleima) sent him to learn in Torah Vodaas where Rav Shmuel’s father, Rav Yaakov was the Rosh Yeshiva. There was a strict yeshiva rule that no bochur under the age of bar mitzva could sleep in the dormitories. Although his grandfather was the Rosh Yeshiva, yeshiva rules are yeshiva rules and his grandfather refused to make any exceptions. He therefore lived with his grandfather for a whole year.

No nepotism in the Kamenetsky home. They also knew that greatness comes not from yichus but through hard work and dedication. A lesson lived by family Kamenetsky and taught by none other than Moshe Rabbeinu in this week’s parsha.

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