Pinchas: Bamidbar (Numbers)

What's it all about?



ART BY HILLEL SMITH © 2025

Pinchas, Aaron's grandson, is rewarded for killing the sinful Zimri and his lover and for stopping the plague, and God awards him a covenant of peace and the priesthood.

The census of the Israelites counts 601,730 men of draftable age, and Moses is instructed on how to divide the land among the tribes. The five daughters of Tzelafchad, whose father died without male heirs, petition Moses to receive their father's inheritance instead, and God accepts their claim and makes it a part of the Torah's laws.

Moses selects Joshua as the future leader of the Israelites, and the parsha concludes with a detailed list of offerings.

> "I hereby bestow My covenant of peace upon him. It will be, for him and for his descendants after him, the eternal covenant of priesthood, because he was zealous for his God and atoned for the Israelites."

Take a deeper dive

Imagine being Joshua: Your mentor, the inimitable Moses, the greatest prophet and teacher the Jewish people ever had, ambles up to you one day and informs you that **you are about to take over as the leader of the Israelites**. It's an extremely tough act to follow, to say nothing of the task that lies ahead—entering the Promised Land. So we can imagine that Joshua asked the very same question we ask as we read this week's parsha—namely **why he, of all people, was selected to lead**.

The Torah gives us little to go on. "God," the parsha tells us, "said to Moses, Convince Joshua son of Nun to accept this position. He is a man of spirit. You must lay your hand upon him.'"

It's a surprising verse, for two reasons. First, God doesn't command Moses to simply inform Joshua that it's now his turn to step up to the plate. Instead, the Almighty informs Moses that **he must convince Joshua to accept the position out of his own free will**.

Why? Because the task ahead is action-packed: The new leader will have to lead the Israelites in war against the Canaanites and the other peoples occupying the Promised Land, and then deliver each tribe to its place of inheritance as they all settle in. It's not the sort of job anyone could do unless he, too, was a man of action, a person who believed in the cause and was proactively enthusiastic about seeing it through.

Hallelujah! Joshua was certainly that. But his willingness to take on the mission wasn't his superpower. Joshua, God tells Moses, "is a man of spirit." What does that mean? Rashi delivers a surprising answer.

Joshua, Rashi explains, "is able to deal with each individual's disposition." Like every truly great leader, Joshua wasn't merely wise or brave or dedicated to his people. He possessed the ability to understand each person's heart, and speak to them in a way that inspired them to rise to the occasion and do their part. He understood that this new generation, the generation raised in the desert, was nothing like the previous one, the one shaped by slavery in Egypt. And he knew how to address his people so that they, like him, would approach their challenges not with fear and trepidation but with a full heart and a stirred soul and with great joy.

Great historical moments call for great leaders, and in Joshua we've a reminder that **there's no greatness greater than simply being able to empathize with your people and speak to them in a language they find moving**.

Join the club

You'll receive our weekly newsletter with the Torah reading, updates on our community and local events, and everything else you need to dive into the greatest story ever told. Visit **simchattorahchallenge.org** to sign up today!