



# Likkutei Sichos

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## The People's Torah

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Translated by Rabbi Kivi Greenbaum

General Editor: Rabbi Eliezer Robbins | Editor: Rabbi Y. Eliezer Danzinger

Content Editor: Rabbi Zalmy Avtzon

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## 1.

### TWO PERSPECTIVES

On the verse (in the section about the daughters of Tzelafchad),<sup>1</sup> “They stood before Moshe, and before Elazar the *kohen*, and before the princes and the entire congregation, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, saying,” *Sifrei*<sup>2</sup> presents a dispute regarding the verse’s meaning:

If Moshe didn’t know, then how would Elazer know?<sup>3</sup> Rather, transpose the verse and interpret it.<sup>4</sup> These are the words of Rabbi Yoshiah. Abba Chanan would say... they {Moshe and Elazar} were both in the study hall when they {the daughters} came and stood before them.<sup>5</sup>

The same dispute is recorded by *Sifrei* in another two places: (a) In the section regarding Pesach Sheni (in *parshas Behaaloscha*) on the verse,<sup>6</sup> “They approached Moshe and Aharon”; (b) in the section regarding the wood-gatherer (in *parshas Shelach*, on the verse,<sup>7</sup> “They brought him... before Moshe and before Aharon and before the entire congregation.”

Here, we see something perplexing in Rashi’s commentary: In *parshas Behaaloscha*, Rashi explains:

*Before Moshe and before Aharon* — They came and inquired before both of them when they were sitting in the study hall. It cannot mean one after the other, because if Moshe didn’t know, then how would Aharon know?

Simply speaking, Rashi is adopting the opinion of Abba Channan. In contrast, on the verse, “before Moshe and before Aharon, and before the entire congregation” (in *parshas Shelach*), Rashi **doesn’t** provide any explanations; and in our *parshah*, he presents **both** opinions, and with the names of their exponents!<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Bamidbar* 27:2.

<sup>2</sup> And in *Gemara (Bava Basra 119b)*.

<sup>3</sup> {Is it possible that Tzelafchad’s daughters stood before Moshe and then went to Elazar to ask their question?}

<sup>4</sup> {First, the daughters went to Elazar, and finally, they went to Moshe.}

<sup>5</sup> {They were not asked separately; rather, the order of the verse reflects their stature.}

<sup>6</sup> *Bamidbar* 9:6.

<sup>7</sup> *Bamidbar* 15:33.

<sup>8</sup> This question is asked by the commentators on Rashi (*Nachalas Yaakov* on *Bamidbar* 9:6; *Maskil L'Dovid* and *Mileches HaKodesh* on *Bamidbar* 9:6 and 27:2), et al.

When Rashi does not provide any commentary in *parshas Shelach*, one could assume that he expects us to recall his commentary from the previous *parshah*, *Behaaloscha*. However, why he presents both opinions in our *parshah* (and includes their names) is altogether perplexing.

Since Rashi in *parshas Behaaloscha* presents only the interpretation “when both of them were sitting...,” this suggests that it is the only interpretation (that of Abba Channan) that fits with the straightforward understanding of the verse.

[As understood simply, a “transposing of a verse” is not smooth according to *pshat*.<sup>9</sup> As Rabbi Yoshiah himself emphasizes “transpose the verse and **interpret it**” — we must use the homiletic mode of exegesis.]

This differs from Rashi’s commentary in our *parshah*, where he brings **both** opinions, suggesting that even the interpretation of Rabbi Yoshiah fits with the simple understanding of the verse.

The contradiction is even more significant since Rabbi Yoshiah’s interpretation **precedes** the interpretation of Abba Channan.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, in *parshas Behaaloscha*, it only says, “before Moshe and before Aharon,” and therefore, we only need to transpose the order of two people {i.e., Moshe and Aharon}. In our *parshah*, it says, “Before Moshe, before Elazar the *kohen*, and before the princes,” which would mean that “transposing the verse” would apply to **three** parties (the princes, Elazar, and Moshe); nevertheless, in our *parshah*, Rashi presents only the interpretation of Rabbi Yoshiah!

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<sup>9</sup> {The plain meaning of Scripture. Rashi says in his commentary to *Bereishis* 3:8: “I have come only to explain the plain meaning of the Scripture.” Though there are many levels and depths of interpretation on the Torah, Rashi adopts a straightforward approach.}

<sup>10</sup> {And we just suggested that the interpretation of Abba Channan conforms better with the simple meaning.}

## 2.

### WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE STUDY HALL?

Seemingly, the reason for the difference between Rashi's explanations in *parshas Behaaloscha* and our *parshah* is related to the wording used in the verses.

In *parshas Behaaloscha*, the verse only mentions “before Moshe and before Aharon,” making it plausible to interpret (according to the simple meaning of the verse) that “**they were both sitting in the study hall....**” However, in our *parshah*, the verse adds “the entire congregation”; therefore, Rashi does not comment (in his first and primary interpretation) that “they were sitting in the study hall,” because it's not possible that “the entire congregation” would have been in the “study hall.”

In truth, however, we cannot explain the difference this way because:

[Firstly, it would be again difficult to explain why Rashi does not address this issue in *parshas Shelach*, where the verse also adds, “(to Moshe and to Aharon) and to the entire congregation.” Therefore, we can't say (as we said before) that he relies on his commentary in *parshas Behaaloscha*: “When they were sitting in the study hall.” Additionally, it is difficult because —]

Rashi himself stated at the end of *parshas Ki Sisa*,<sup>11</sup> “What was the order of instruction?... All the people would enter the study hall.” This means that in that place (“the study hall”), where Moshe taught Torah to the Jewish people, “all the people” entered. Therefore, also in our case, there is no difficulty as to how “the entire congregation” could have fit into the study hall.

The reason for this is that the terms, “all the people,” and, “the entire congregation,” do not necessarily mean that every single Jew attended. Rather, the terms refer to those who were interested in learning, etc.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, it is not

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<sup>11</sup> Rashi on *Shemos* 34:32.

<sup>12</sup> See Rashi's commentary on *Shemos* 33:7.

difficult<sup>13</sup> to explain that all of them (Moshe, Elazar, the princes and the “entire congregation”) were present in the study hall.

Furthermore, in our verse, it is even easier to understand how they were “sitting in the study hall”: Scripture says, “the entire **congregation**” (and not “all the people”), and Rashi has explained many times<sup>14</sup> that the term, “the entire congregation,” can refer to just the Sanhedrin {representing the “entire congregation”}.

Therefore, the question remains: Why does Rashi not present his earlier interpretation — “they were sitting in the study hall” — as his first and primary interpretation?

### 3.

WHERE WERE THEY?

There is another difference between the verse in our *parshah* and the one in *parshas Behaaloscha*. And this other difference can seemingly explain why Rashi here deviates from his previous interpretation.

In *parshas Behaaloscha*, the verse does not mention the whereabouts of Moshe and Aharon. Therefore, Rashi can explain the verse as meaning, “they came and inquired of them when they were both sitting in the study hall.” In our *parshah*, however, the verse explicitly states that Moshe and Aharon were at the “entrance of the Tent of Meeting.” We could say that this is why Rashi does not want to explain, as his first and primary interpretation, that “they were sitting in the study hall.”

However, this explanation is insufficient, because:

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<sup>13</sup> See Rashi on *Vayikra* 8:3.

<sup>14</sup> *Vayikra* 4:13; *Bamidbar* 14:1; see also *Bamidbar* 10:2; it is similarly explained with respect to our topic in *Yad Rama* (and *Rashash*) on *Bava Basra* 119b.

- a) Simply put, the “entrance of the Tent of Meeting” and the “study hall” were both in the same place: “The entrance of the Tent of Meeting” refers to the courtyard of the *Mishkan*,<sup>15</sup> and the study hall was also in the courtyard of the *Mishkan*, next to the Altar, as **Rashi** says in the beginning of *parshas Mishpatim*:<sup>16</sup> “That you shall place the Sanhedrin next to the Altar.” Therefore, we could say that “the entrance of the Tent of Meeting” means “the study hall.”
- b) Even if we argue we cannot interpret the phrase in **this** verse, “the entrance of the Tent of Meeting,” as referring to “the study hall,” we need to provide a reason. Additionally, why is it necessary, in general (according to this interpretation), to specify that “they were in the study hall”? Rashi could have simply stated (**as before**) that “they stood before them all,” and as **the verse** states, this was at “the entrance of the Tent of Meeting”!

#### 4.

##### EQUAL SITTING

We can clarify all the above by prefacing with a general explanation of the wording, “if Moshe did not know....”

Rashi’s commentary<sup>17</sup> on the verse implies that the **simple** meaning of the verse proves that the inquiry (of the “men who were...”<sup>18</sup> and of the “daughters of Tzelafchad”)<sup>19</sup> was asked separately from each questioned party. However, there are two ways this could have happened: either in one conversation (at the same time), or one after the other. Therefore, (in *parshas Behaaloscha*) **after** Rashi explained that “they inquired when they were both sitting in the study hall,” he elaborates (unlike his usual style in many places) in order to **negate** that the question was posed to each party one after the other: “It is impossible to say that

<sup>15</sup> Rashi on *Shemos* 29:11, 32.

<sup>16</sup> *Shemos* 21:1; there are versions that say “next to the *Mikdash*.”

<sup>17</sup> And *Sifrei* and the Gemara, loc. cit.

<sup>18</sup> {*Bamidbar* 9:6.}

<sup>19</sup> {*Bamidbar* 27:1.}

it was one after the other because if Moshe did not know, then how would Aharon know?” In our *parshah* as well, he refutes the idea {that the inquiry was made one after the other by asking}, “Is it possible that if Moshe did not know, then Elazar would know?”

Furthermore, after Rashi quotes the words from the verse “before Moshe” (in our *parshah*), he adds, “**afterwards** before Elazar.” Perhaps by saying this, Rashi emphasizes that “and before {Elazar}” means exactly as it would if it said, “and afterwards before (Elazar)” {that is, the inquiry was made separately to each person}.

We could explain it as follows: If the verse had said, “before Moshe **and** Aharon” (and similarly “before Moshe **and** Elazar, etc.”), it would imply that the inquiry was asked to Moshe together with Aharon (and others). This would also mean that the inquiry was primarily directed at Moshe, with Aharon (and others) being mentioned because they were together with Moshe.<sup>20</sup>

However, since the verse includes a separate “before” — “and **before** Aharon” (similarly, “and **before** Elazar...”)<sup>21</sup> — it forces Rashi to conclude that the inquiry was asked again to Aharon, as well (and Elazar...).

Since “It is impossible to say that it was one after the other” (according to the order of the verses, as **after** asking Moshe, Aharon was asked), Rashi therefore says, “they came and inquired when both of them were sitting **in the study hall.**” In **this** way, the inquiry was addressed to both Aharon and Moshe equally, as will be explained.

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<sup>20</sup> See *Maskil L'Dovid* on *Bamidbar* 9:6.

<sup>21</sup> See also *Maskil L'Dovid* here; *Be'er Yitzchak* on *Bamidbar* 9:6.

## 5.

### STUDYING TOGETHER

“The study hall” is a place where people study Torah together. (It is not a place where Jews gather to hear Torah, halachah, *drush*<sup>22</sup> or the like from a scholar.) This means that although in the study hall there is a rabbi, rosh yeshiva, or the like, and there are students (of varying levels), the meaning of a study hall is a place where all “those who sit in the study hall” participate in the learning: they hear the question, debate it, and so on.

Therefore, clearly, the questions raised in “the study hall” differ from those presented to the courts, a judge, or a rabbi. When a question is presented to a court, a judge, or a rabbi, even when students are present, it is understood that the question is directed solely to the court. When a question is raised in a **study** hall, on the other hand, it is presented (not to the head of the academy, to the rosh yeshiva, etc., but) to all “those who are sitting in the study hall.” They all analyze the question and can offer their opinions.

This is why Rashi says, “They came to ask them a question when both of them were in the **study hall**.” Aharon heard the question because they were both in the study hall (and were learning Torah together). Therefore, the question was asked to both of them equally — “**before** Moshe and **before** Aharon.”

This is also why Rashi, in our *parshah*, deviates (in his second comment) from the wording of the verse, changing from “the entrance of the Tent of Meeting” to “they were sitting **in the study hall**.” The reason {Elazar was also asked} is that they were in the study hall, and not because they happened to be together.

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<sup>22</sup> {*Drush* is an exegetical method of commentary in which the words of a verse are used as a platform to express an ostensibly extrinsic idea.}



## 6.

### IT'S THE ORDER

Accordingly, it is clear why, in his commentary on our *parshah*, Rashi doesn't use this as his first and primary interpretation:

Rashi explains that the purpose of the phrase, “the entrance of the Tent of Meeting,” in the verse is not (so much) to inform us of the location where they were (for what difference would it make?), but rather, to describe (primarily) **how** they were assembled: “The entrance of the Tent of Meeting” is the place<sup>23</sup> where the entire congregation came together (not to sit and learn together, but) to listen to what Moshe Rabbeinu had to say.

Therefore, as simply understood, the point of our verse is **not** that “they were {situated} in the study hall”; rather, “they were” {gathered} at “the entrance of the Tent of Meeting,” as previously mentioned.

We could, with difficulty, argue that “the entrance of the Tent of Meeting” (in **context**, as a place of assembly) refers specifically to the (last) words, “the entire congregation”:

Moshe, Elazar, and the princes were in the study hall (and the daughters of Tzelafchad asked all of them equally, as was the convention regarding a question asked in the study hall, as discussed). At that time, the entire congregation stood at the “entrance of the Tent of Meeting,” (assembled) to hear Moshe's response to the daughters of Tzelafchad .<sup>24</sup>

However, it would be extremely strained to interpret the verse as dividing the parties as being found in two different places (Moshe... Elazar... and the princes” were seated in the study hall, while “the entire congregation (had

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<sup>23</sup> See *Bamidbar* 10:3; Rashi on *Bamidbar* 10:2.

<sup>24</sup> Simply, the question of the daughters of Tzelafchad applied (in actuality or in potential) to all of Israel. Therefore, when people heard the daughters were going to ask Moshe, the people all gathered in the designated place for assembly to learn how the law was decided.

assembled) at the “entrance of the Tent of Meeting”).<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, Rashi’s first and primary explanation is that we should “transpose the verse.” The verse says, “before Moshe **and before** Elazar the *kohen* (**and before** the princes)” because they had indeed asked “one after the other,” but the **order** in which they asked is the reverse of what is stated in the verse.

According to this interpretation, all the words in the verse are meant straightforwardly, and the difficulty lies only in why the verse changes the **order** of those who were asked.<sup>26</sup>

## 7.

### THE GREAT DEBATE

This is also why Rashi quotes the two interpretations using their names, Rabbi Yoshiah and Abba Channan. Rashi wants to emphasize that these two perspectives on how to translate the verse

— whether to “transpose the verse” (that in the same verse, the words should not remain in their order); or that it is better to force the meaning into the verse rather than to “transpose the verse”<sup>27</sup> —

apply not only to **this** verse alone, but is a principled dispute (found in many places) between Rabbi Yoshiah and Abba Channan. We find in many places that Rabbi Yoshiah<sup>28</sup> says, “transpose the verse,” while Abba Channan’s opinion<sup>29</sup> is that we should accept a strained approach to the **interpreting** of a verse, rather than say, “transpose the verse.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Note *Shach* on the Torah, on *Bamidbar* 27:2 (and loc. cit., because Moshe never sat at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting).

<sup>26</sup> Because he didn’t want to mention the student before the teacher in the verse, etc. (*Rashbam* on *Bava Basra* 119b; et al.).

<sup>27</sup> See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 7; similar to the idea that “there is no chronological order in one subject.”

<sup>28</sup> As discussed above, quoting *Sifrei*; see also *Midrash Tehillim* 36:7; *Bereishis Rabbah* ch. 33, sec. 1; *Pesikta DeRabbi Kahana*, “*shor oh kesev*.”

<sup>29</sup> *Sifrei*, *ibid*.

## 8.

### IT WAS ABOUT WHICH PUNISHMENT

Based on the above explanation, we can also understand why Rashi does not address the same question in his commentary on the section about the wood-gatherer.

Since the difficulty was about how the Jews could also bring a legal question to Aharon, etc. (after asking Moshe Rabbeinu), there is no such difficulty regarding the case of the wood-gatherer: Rashi explains<sup>30</sup> that “They didn’t know which capital punishment should be administered, but they knew that one who desecrates Shabbos is executed.” Meaning, they brought him {the wood-gatherer} to Moshe, to Aharon, and to the entire congregation (primarily) (not for legal clarification, but they brought him) to **hand him over** to the community, so the community would carry out the capital punishment. Which type of execution should be administered? That was for the community to decide.

Therefore, it is easy to understand why here, Aharon and the entire congregation are placed on an equal footing with Moshe, because we are speaking about delivering the wood-gatherer to the community — to Moshe, Aharon, and the entire congregation.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *Bamidbar* 15:34.

<sup>31</sup> Note *Bamidbar* 31:12.

## 9.

### THE BLASPHEMER

Now we can understand another similar idea to the one mentioned above:

In the narrative discussing the blasphemer (in *parshas Emor*),<sup>32</sup> the verse says, “they brought him to Moshe” — only to Moshe. This seems perplexing: The incidents of the wood-gatherer and the blasphemer took place “in the same time period” (as Rashi notes there).<sup>33</sup> So why was the blasphemer only brought to Moshe, while the wood-gatherer was brought to Moshe, Aharon, and the entire congregation?

Based on the above explanation, this becomes clear: **Rashi** says there:<sup>34</sup>

They knew that the wood-gatherer was liable to death... the mode of death however had not been specified..., while with the blasphemer, the verse says ‘to specify for them,’ for they did not know whether he was liable for the death penalty.

Meaning, with the blasphemer, where there was a question of law (whether he was liable to the death penalty), so, obviously, Moshe Rabbeinu had to be consulted. However, concerning the wood-gatherer, whom “they knew” was liable to the death penalty, he was transported, as one liable for the death penalty (primarily) is brought forth to the public — to Moshe, Aharon, and the entire congregation.

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<sup>32</sup> *Vayikra* 24:11.

<sup>33</sup> *Vayikra* 24:12.

<sup>34</sup> *Vayikra* 24:12.

## 10.

FROM BELOW TO ABOVE

From the “wine of Torah”<sup>35</sup> in Rashi’s commentary:

The (deeper) reason that Rashi brings these specific interpretations in the sections concerning Pesach Sheni and the daughters of Tzelafchad (and not in the section concerning the wood-gatherer) could be because these interpretations are **thematically** connected to how these sections were communicated:

These two sections are unique because they were transmitted and conveyed from Above in response to the claims and requests of those **below**.<sup>36</sup> The section of Pesach Sheni came about in response to the complaint (of the “men who were impure”) questioning, “why should we be excluded from bringing the offering...”<sup>37</sup> By the complaint and petition of the daughters of Tzelafchad — “Why should our father's name be eliminated...? Give us a portion...”<sup>38</sup> — the section of inheritance was given.

This is also the connection {of these sections} to the two concepts, “transpose the verse” and, “they were sitting in the study hall,” as both emphasize the importance of Torah study by individuals **below**.

“Transpose the verse” — the “verse” as it is received “from Above” is not understood, and only through the person who studies the verse transposing it does its meaning become clear.

The same applies to the clause, “they were in the study hall”: Learning Torah in the study hall emphasizes the virtue of a person studying in this world,

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<sup>35</sup> {The deeper ideas in Torah.}

<sup>36</sup> The content of the two sections is also connected to the *avodah* initiated by people, from below: Pesach Sheni’s theme is **teshuvah**, which involves *avodah* from below to Above (see, extensively, in *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 18, p. 118 ff); And the section concerning the daughters of Tzelafchad underscores the virtue of the **daughter** {the female}, the recipient.

<sup>37</sup> *Bamidbar* 9:6-7.

<sup>38</sup> *Bamidbar* 27:4.

in contrast to assembling (at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting — hearing the word of Hashem through Moshe, or assembling the people in the year of *hakhel* — listening to the word of Hashem through the king {reading the Torah}, etc.), where the emphasis is on the greatness On High, as those assembled only listened and received the word.

In fact, a study hall without novel insights being produced is not a study hall.<sup>39</sup> By group deliberations, etc., new insights in Torah are developed.

[This is analogous to the superiority of the Oral Torah over the Written Torah.<sup>40</sup> The Written Torah represents Torah as it exists “Above,” and {therefore} the specifics of the mitzvos are not revealed. The Oral Torah extracts and reveals {these specifics} through the efforts of individuals “below,” resulting in “literally, a multitude of new ideas in the Oral Torah that are only intimated by Scripture.]<sup>41</sup>

## 11.

### NEW SECTIONS

On this basis, we can also discern the (deeper) reason that in *parshas Behaaloscha*, Rashi offers only the interpretation, “when they were both sitting in the study hall,” whereas with the daughters of Tzelafchad, he offers both interpretations (with the main one being, “transpose the verse”).

The distinction between “transpose the verse” and “sitting in the study hall” is as follows: “Transpose the verse” emphasizes the order as it is **written** in Torah, while “the study hall” emphasizes the process of **study** through which a law is **fundamentally developed**.

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<sup>39</sup> *Chagigah* 3a.

<sup>40</sup> See *Toras Chaim*, “*Chayei Sarah*,” 134a ff.; and at length in *Hemshech 5666*, p. 383 ff.; et al.

<sup>41</sup> *Hemshech 5666*, *ibid.*; similarly, *Toras Chaim*, *ibid.* (134c).

Therefore, the section concerning Pesach Sheni, where the complaint, “why should we be excluded” (according to all opinions) led to the creation of a **new law**, a new section of Torah was **promulgated**, the innovation is best depicted in the milieu of “sitting in the study hall” (the place where new laws are passed).

On the other hand, in the section about the daughters of Tzelafchad, Rashi says<sup>42</sup> that “the law **was concealed** from him” (from Moshe). The law had been **already communicated** to Moshe. Through their intervention, however, Tzelafchad’s daughters (as Rashi says in his nuanced remark),<sup>43</sup> “they merited... **and it was written** because of them.” Because of them, the law was revealed to Moshe again, and subsequently, **written** in the Torah. Therefore, the first and primary interpretation is “transpose the verse.” Meaning, the verse is **written** such that it emphasizes the importance of *avodah*<sup>44</sup> from below.

However, considering that there is also an opinion<sup>45</sup> that the Torah section detailing the laws of inheritance was entirely new, a result of the daughters of Tzelafchad, Rashi also includes the opinion of Abba Channan, that “they were sitting in the study hall.”

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<sup>42</sup> *Bamidbar* 27:5.

<sup>43</sup> Like the version of the Gemara (*Bava Basra* 119a and *Sanhedrin* 8a), and unlike the version of *Sifrei* on *Bamidbar* 27:5, “to be said... that it was said,” — see, extensively, *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 13, p. 94ff.

<sup>44</sup> {Divine service.}

<sup>45</sup> Like the version of *Sifrei* (as mentioned above) “that it was said.”

## 12.

### THE FINALE

May it be His will that just as the request and argument made by Tzelafchad's daughters, "give us a possession," resulted in the Torah section detailing the laws of inheritance being given from Above; and action is the main thing — the actual granting of inheritance to Tzelafchad's daughters in the land of Israel<sup>46</sup> —

may it be in these days, at the culmination of the exile, that the constant collective petition of the Jewish people to Hashem, "**Speedily** cause the scion of David your servant to sprout forth,"<sup>47</sup> "May our eyes behold your return to Zion in mercy"<sup>48</sup> —

should usher in the true and complete redemption through our righteous Moshiach. Then, every Jew will decidedly and openly receive his inheritance in the Holy Land, as "Hashem will distribute it to them personally,"<sup>49</sup> speedily in our days, literally.

— Based on a talk delivered on *Motzei Shabbos parshas Pinchas*, 5738 (1978)

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<sup>46</sup> As stated explicitly in *Yehoshua* 17:4.

<sup>47</sup> {*Siddur*, "Amidah prayer."}

<sup>48</sup> {*Ibid.*}

<sup>49</sup> *Bava Basra* 122a; see *Or HaTorah*, "Pinchas," pp. 1065 ff.