

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI BORUCH LEFF

Kol Yaakov

“War is a crime against humanity."
"There is no such thing as a justified war."

These are statements from pacifists. "Pacifism: Opposition to the use of force under any circumstances; refusal for reasons of conscience to participate in war or military action." (Webster's New World Dictionary)

What is the Jewish view of pacifism? What does peace really mean? This week's Torah portion, Pinchas, instructs us concerning all of these issues.

Since Parshat Pinchas begins in the middle of a story, let's re-cap events from last week's portion, Balak. Many Jewish men were seduced by Moabite women and acted promiscuously with them. These women also influenced their victims to worship idols. One of the leaders of the men who were seduced, Zimri, of the tribe of Shimon, desired to publicly declare his support for involvement with the Moabite women. He brazenly committed his lewd, sexual acts in full view of Moshe and the Jewish people. G-d sent a plague, and 24,000 Jewish men, who were seduced, died. Pinchas could not tolerate Zimri's brazenness and promptly killed Zimri and his partner in sin, Kozbi, a Moabite princess. After Pinchas' zealous act, the plague ceased.

G-d begins this week's portion saying to Moshe, "Pinchas, the son of Elazar, the son of Ahron, the Priest, turned back my fury from the Jewish nation when he zealously avenged my vengeance among them. This is why I did not consume the Jewish nation in My vengeance. Therefore, say: Behold, I give him (Pinchas) My covenant of peace." (Bamidbar 25:10-12)

We know that G-d administers reward and punishment with the device called 'measure for measure.' The punishment or reward must fit the crime or good deed. In this case, Pinchas' act of zealousness is rewarded with peace. Is that measure for measure? Do we usually associate a peaceful person with being a zealot?

G-d is teaching us a fundamental lesson about war and peace. Wars are necessary at times. There is such a thing as a justified war. As Kohelet 3:8 states, "There is a time for war."

G-d is saying to Moshe, "Tell Pinchas that his zealousness is peace." Peace does not mean a

passive lack of war. If peace is a passive lack of war there is no way that through Pinchas' violent act of killing he achieves peace. Peace is a state of being in which there is a closeness, a relationship, a way of dealing with each other. It isn't just that I don't bother you and you don't bother me; that's not peace. It's that we live together and work together and have a unity, a commonality that all of us are part of a whole.

In Hebrew, the word for peace, shalom, is derived from the root shalem, which means whole or complete. Peace is a cooperative, symbiotic relationship, where both parties care for each other, help each other, and ultimately perfect each other. Two people who hate each other and never speak to each other, but never fight either, cannot be said to be at peace with each other. Marital harmony and domestic tranquility does not mean the simple lack of screaming and yelling in the house. It is a state of being in which your spouse genuinely shares in your triumphs, strengthens you when you are down, loves, adores, and cherishes you. (This is why it is a misnomer to refer to the 1979 Camp David agreement with Egypt as a 'peace' treaty. At most, it is a ceasefire. The rhetoric of hatred and contempt by Egypt for Israel, and anti-Semitism in the Egyptian press has never ceased. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak has never even visited Israel, except to attend Yitzchak Rabin's funeral.)

Since peace is an active force rather than a passive lack of war, ultimately anything that disturbs and destroys this state of true peace must be removed in order for true shalom-peace-to exist. That is why Pinchas, through his zealous act, actually creates peace. Pinchas stops the plague against the Jewish people and through a violent act of war brings peace.

It is very often necessary to create peace only through what seems to be an act of violence. One must remove those things that disturb the harmony and that create tensions between peoples in order for peace to exist. And it is not always possible to remove the items that block peace through non-violent means.

Does anyone seriously think that the Nazis could have been dealt with non-violently? Can Osama bin Laden be dealt with non-violently? Ariel Sharon has always said that the path to peace in the Middle East must begin with decisive military action against the terrorist infrastructure. Only once violence, as an option, is rooted out can peace be achieved. One can

**TORAS AISH IS A WEEKLY PARSHA
NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL AND THE
WORLD WIDE WEB AT HTTP://AISHDAS.ORG.
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even argue similarly for Harry Truman's decision to drop the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki which brought peace in ending WWII. We have seen the famous picture of the mushroom cloud which killed approximately 400,000 people. Was Truman's act of war justified? Consider the following:

"In a meeting on 18 June the Joint War Plans Committee gave Truman projected death rates ranging from a low of 31,000 to a high of 50,000, and a projected American causality rate (deaths, injuries and missing) of 132,500. During fighting in the Pacific, from 1 March 1944 to 1 May 1945, the Japanese were killed at a ratio of 22 to 1. Thus, if we use an estimate of 40,000 American deaths, we can extrapolate 880,000 Japanese deaths-for a combined total of 920,000 deaths. Although death rates for Hiroshima and Nagasaki vary widely, none are even half this high. Thus we can conclude that if an invasion of Kyushu had been necessary, and the Japanese were killed at a rate comparable to previous fighting, then the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki actually SAVED lives."

(Barton J. Bernstein, "Understanding the Atomic Bomb and the Japanese Surrender: Missed Opportunities, Little-Known Near Disasters, and Modern Memory," Hiroshima in History and Memory, ed. Michael J. Hogan [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996], p.45)

If all people in the world were committed to achieving a real peace, one which involves a cooperative, symbiotic relationship, perhaps pacifism could be a viable movement. Since this is not the case, we must often destroy violently those things that create tensions between peoples in order for peace to exist.

In the real world, wars usually bring ultimate peace, not pacifists. © 2008 Rabbi B. Leff & aish.com

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week begins a series of haftorah readings which reflect the inner feelings of the Jewish people during their final months of the year. The series consists of moving visions of the prophets depicting the pending Jewish exile and destruction of the Bais Hamikdash and concludes with an ongoing exchange between Hashem and the Jewish people

expressing a strong desire for reunification. Our haftorah speaks about the introduction of Yirmiyahu into prophecy and shows him somewhat reluctant to serve as the leading prophet of Israel. Yirmiyahu's concern centered around his young age coupled with his lack of experience in speaking to an entire nation. He recognized the painful nature of his catastrophic predictions and feared that his prophetic words would actually endanger his own life. Hashem responded that He would personally direct Yirmiyahu and protect him from all opposing forces. Yirmiyahu consented and received his first prophecy which he described in the following words. "And Hashem sent His hand which touched my mouth and He said to me, 'Behold I've placed my words in your mouth.'" This unique description of prophecy as "words placed in the mouth", rather than words spoken to the prophet, suggest a strong dimension of force. It seems that Yirmiyahu actually felt compelled to speak his words of prophecy at all costs.

In truth, we find special significance given to the prophetic status of Yirmiyahu. Our Chazal (in Yalkut Shimoni 256) take note of the specific expression used by the Torah when introducing prophecy. In Parshas Shoftim (Devorim 18, 18) Hashem said to Moshe, "I shall establish a prophet amongst them likened to yourself. I shall place My words in his mouth and he will convey to the Jewish people everything I command." Chazal reflect upon the words, "prophet likened to yourself (Moshe)" used here which suggest a parallel between Moshe and other prophets. Chazal raise the question that the Torah unequivocally states that no one ever achieved parallel status of prophecy to that of Moshe Rabbeinu. What the nis meant by these words "a prophet likened to yourself"? Chazal answer that these words allude to the unique role of the prophet Yirmiyahu. They explain that there was a clear parallel between the role of Yirmiyahu as the prophet of rebuke and the role of Moshe Rabbeinu. They even draw lines between the life of Moshe Rabbeinu and that of Yirmiyahu. They note that he served a full term of forty years and was personally responsible for the ethical conduct of the entire nation. In addition, each of them faced serious opposition from their people for the hard stand they took in defending the name of Hashem. The Mahari Kra in support of this point (see comment to Yirmiyahu 1:9) adds that even the terminology used to describe their prophecy is of exact nature. The Torah refers to the prophecy of Moshe Rabbeinu and states, "I shall place My words in his mouth." Interestingly, this exact expression "I have placed My words in your mouth" is used when describing the prophecy of Yirmiyahu.

As we have now seen, the introduction of prophecy makes direct reference to the ultimate prophet of doom, Yirmiyahu. One could question the high priority that Yirmiyahu's prophecy occupies in the

Torah. Why did Moshe Rabbeinu make reference to the prophet Yirmiyahu at the inception of prophecy and single him out from the other forty seven leading prophets? What was so significant about Yirmiyahu's dimension of rebuke that made it the prime focus of Moshe Rabbeinu's earliest discussion about prophecy?

In search for clarification of this point it is beneficial to study Moshe Rabbeinu's reflections on the establishment of prophecy. In Parshas Shoftim Moshe says, "Hashem will establish a prophet in response to all that you requested of him at Sinai on the day you received the Torah. You said, 'I can not continue hearing the direct voice of Hashem and will no longer risk perishing when seeing this great fire.'" "Hashem responded, 'I will establish a prophet likened to you and will place My words in his mouth.'" (D'vorim 18:16) The Ramban (ad loc.) explains that the Jewish people requested that Hashem transmit His messages to them through words of prophecy. They found it too difficult to listen directly to Hashem because of the intensity of His words and opted to hear them through the prophets. With this request they agreed to hear the clear words of the prophets regardless of the severity of their nature. Hashem, in effect, consented to the Jewish people's request for prophecy, reserving the right to address them in the strongest of terms. The Jewish people readily accepted this alternative in place of hearing Hashem's direct and piercing words.

We now have a clear perspective regarding Moshe Rabbeinu's hidden prediction to the Jews. In truth, during Moshe's era the Jewish people were fully willing to listen to his piercing words of prophecy. This was of course in place of an all too familiar and highly intensified experience of listening to the words of Hashem Himself. Yet in later generations when the Jews would stray from the path of Hashem this task would become extremely difficult. Now that the dreaded alternative of hearing directly from Hashem was far out of sight the Jewish people could be prone to silencing their prophets restricting them from conveying penetrating messages. Moshe, therefore, warned them at the outset that their agreement was eternally binding and that in later years Hashem would send them a prophet whose words of rebuke would be as piercing as those of Moshe Rabbeinu himself.

We can now appreciate the opening words of Yirmiyahu in which he portrayed himself as compelled to speak the word of Hashem. It was the unpleasant role of Yirmiyahu to predict, in the most vivid form, the Jewish exile and the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash. These tidings were so penetrating and dreadful that the Jewish people would react to them as if they had heard direct words from Hashem. Yirmiyahu sensed the intensity of his prophetic mission and felt as if Hashem Himself was speaking directly to the Jewish people. He therefore expressed that Hashem placed words in the prophets mouth and delivered them

directly to the Jewish people. In this regard Yirmiyahu was truly likened to Moshe Rabbeinu through whom Hashem delivered the clearest of messages to His people. © 2008 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Daughters-and-Law

There is a fascinating sequence of events in this week's portion that is analyzed by the Medrash and expounded upon by every major Torah commentator. At the beginning of Chapter 27, the daughters of Zelophchad appeal to Moshe. Their father died in the desert, but he was not amongst the insurgents who rebelled against Moshe during Korach's uprising. He died of his own sin and left no sons. The daughters want an inheritance in the Land of Israel.

Moshe did not remember the law and consulted with Hashem. He advised Moshe that Zelophchad's daughters had a valid argument. They were entitled to a portion of the land that had been allotted for Zelophchad.

The ensuing section of the weekly Parsha has Hashem reminding Moshe that he will not enter the Land of Israel. Immediately a conversation follows. In verses 15-18 Moshe pleads to Hashem, "the Lord of all spirits and flesh to appoint a man over the assembly who will go out before them and go in before them; so they shall not be like sheep that have no shepherd."

Rashi quotes a Medrash that links the two episodes. He explains that after Moshe saw that Zelophchad's daughters were entitled to inherit the Land, he felt that the time had come to ask for the torch of leadership to be passed to his own children. This does not come to pass. Hashem tells Moshe to bestow authority to his own disciple, Joshua, who ultimately leads the Jewish Nation into Israel.

Many Biblical commentators are puzzled by the connection of the request of Zelophchad's daughters and Moshe's request. Why did the former prompt the latter?

Second, were Moshe's sons worthy of leadership or not? It seems that only after Moshe saw that Zelophchad's daughter's inherited did he say, "the time has come that I shall ask for my needs." Why would the episode or conveyance of land to Zelophchad's kin affect Moshe's opinion of his own children's leadership abilities?

The pious and humble Tzadik, Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan of Radin, known as the Chofetz Chaim, was once riding a train to Radin. He wore a simple cap and traveled alone, and hardly anyone knew who he was. A middle-aged Jew sat down beside him and asked him where he was going. The Chofetz Chaim answered softly, "to Radin."

The man was excited. "Do you know the saintly Chofetz Chaim? I am going to Radin just to see him!"

The Chofetz Chaim was unimpressed. "M'nyeh," he shrugged. "I don't think he is so saintly."

The visitor was so appalled that he slapped the old man and left his seat shouting. "How dare you make light of the leader of our generation!" A week later the man came to the humble abode of the great Tzadik. Lo and behold, the old man from the train was sitting by the table in the dining room. The man collapsed in shock.

He could not stop apologizing for the incident on the train when the Chofetz Chaim halted him. "Do not worry, you taught me a great lesson," said the sage. "One may not even slander himself."

R' Mordechai of Czernobel (d.1837) explains the connection. Moshe was concerned that the very sin that prohibited him entry into the Land of Israel would also prevent his children a chance at inheriting leadership.

When Hashem told Moshe that Zelophchad's daughters shall not suffer for any past misdeeds, he reconsidered his own situation. He realized that his problem and sin had nothing to do with his children. They should not suffer from his humility and self-effacing.

We all may get down on ourselves at one time or another. But our children look up to us. We must show that we have confidence in ourselves. The qualities that they believe we possess are those that we must pass on to them. © 1997 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI ABBA WAGENSBERG

Between the Lines

This week's parsha contains the explosive story of Pinchas (Moses's great-nephew), who sees an act of immorality being committed between Zimri, the prince of the tribe of Shimon, and Kozbi, a Midianite princess. Pinchas takes swift action at eliminating these two people, which subsequently stops the plague G-d has sent as punishment, saving countless Jewish lives.

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 82a) fleshes out the picture of what occurred before Zimri united with Kuzbi in full public view. Zimri challenged Moses: "Son of Amram! Is this Midianite woman prohibited or permitted to me? If you say she is prohibited, who permitted you to marry your Midianite wife, Tzipporah?"

(Moses married Tzipporah prior to the giving of the Torah, at which time there was no prohibition against marrying Midianite women, whereas Zimri's act was performed after the giving of the Torah, when the prohibition was in full effect. Furthermore, Moses had converted Tzipporah to pre-Torah "Judaism," whereas Zimri had no such intentions. However, these issues were of no concern to Zimri; sometimes, people just aren't interested in answers.)

According to the Talmud, at the moment that Zimri presented his challenge, Moses forgot the law he

had received from G-d at Sinai: namely, that a zealot must take action to eliminate the Jewish perpetrator of such an immoral act. Moses's momentary forgetfulness caused an outbreak of weeping among the entire nation (Numbers 25:6).

This story presents several difficulties. First of all, why did Moses's forgetting a law elicit so many tears? There are far greater tragedies to cry over! Furthermore, the situation was not irreversible; it would simply take a moment for Moses to ask G-d what the law was!

Another puzzling issue regards the Talmud's comment (Sanhedrin 82a) that it was Pinchas who reminded Moses of the forgotten law - and that, even once Moses had been reminded, it was Pinchas, not Moses, who carried out Zimri's punishment. This seems strange. Once Moses's memory had been refreshed, he himself should have carried out the command!

This is so for two reasons. First, it is always better to perform a mitzvah oneself than to appoint someone else to do it (Kiddushin 41a). Second, Pinchas came from less-than-ideal lineage, and his action could have been criticized: How could a "descendant of idolaters" have the audacity to eliminate a prince of Israel? Whereas if Moses had been the one to eliminate Zimri, no one would have dared to comment.

A useful insight can be gleaned from the Talmud (Bava Batra 116a), which states that anyone with an ill family member should go to a tzaddik so that the tzaddik can pray on the ill person's behalf. This is a troubling comment. Why do we need holy people to pray for us? Can't we pray on our own? The Me'iri (in Beit HaBechira) explains that we are instructed to go to a righteous person in order to observe how the righteous person prays. Watching the righteous person will then teach us how to pray on our own. From here, Rabbi Zev Leff points out that the role of a leader is to teach people how to function on their own. A leader is not intended to act instead of the people; rather, a master teacher should produce other leaders, not just followers.

This idea will enable us to resolve the two difficulties we raised before. The people did not cry because Moses forgot the law; rather, they cried because Moses's forgetfulness caused them to recognize their own lack of initiative. The whole nation was aware of Moses's imminent death, and they became terrified about their fate. Who would be the next one to lead the people? Would they be helpless once Moses was gone? For a few moments, everyone stood around staring at each other, not knowing what to do. This scenario was certainly something to cry about, because Moses would have failed as a leader had he not produced people who could lead in his absence.

This idea also helps us understand why Pinchas had to be the one to take action, not Moses.

Even after Moses was reminded of the law, he intentionally restrained himself from taking action. He did this in order to see if he had been successful as a leader - i.e. if he had succeeded in producing others who knew how to lead.

May we all be blessed to understand that a Jewish leader does not act instead of the people, but rather provides a model to follow. With this in mind, let us all learn from the greats around us and instill in our children the confidence and skill to be the leaders of the next generation. © 2008 Rabbi A. Wagensberg & aish.com

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**O**ur father died in the desert, and he was not among the congregation that convened against G-d with the congregation of Korach, for he died because of his own sin, and he had no sons” (Bamidbar 27:3). When the daughters of Tzelafchad made their case for inheriting the land that would have gone to their father, they didn't just say that he died, but mention specifically that he was not part of Korach's rebellion. As the Ramban points out, this seems superfluous. The only information needed for their request was that their father had died without any sons. Additionally, Korach's rebellion was not the only problem that occurred that resulted in people dying (i.e. the "golden calf," the desire for meat, the "spies," etc). Why did the daughters feel the need to mention their father not having died in that instance, more than any of the others?

The Talmud (Bava Basra 118b) says that the daughter's of Tzelafchad knew that the 250 men that joined Korach's rebellion (Bamidbar 16:2) would have no share in the land, and therefore mentioned that their father was not part of that assembly. The question remains, however, why it was specifically that group that was deprived of having their portion of the land go to their descendants, while the descendants of the others who had died (including those that tried to enter the land after the incident of the "spies," the one who gathered wood on Shabbos and those who complained about the mun (manna) and were bitten by the vipers, any of whom might have been Tzelafchad according to various opinions) were able to inherit the land that would have gone to their father.

There is a disagreement in the Talmud (ibid) whether the 250 that united with Korach were given no portion at all (and so it was divided among the rest of the nation), or if their portion was taken away from them, and like the portions that would have gone to the "spies," were given to Yehoshua and Kalev. We can understand why the land was taken away from the "spies," as they showed, through their report, that they didn't want to go there. However why would these 250 have lost their portion, more than any of the other sinners?

Who were these 250 men who had joined Korach's rebellion? Collectively, they were individuals who questioned whether the tribe of Levi was chosen for G-d's service. Some were members of the tribe of Reuvain, who had lost the status of being the "firstborn" when it was given to Yosaif, and some were the firstborn of their family, who had been chosen for G-d's service until it was given to the Levi'im after the sin of the "golden calf." (Tzelafchad himself was a bechor (firstborn), which entitled him to a double portion of his father's land, which was part of what his daughters were asking for.) The 250 had the audacity to bring an incense offering, even after Nadav and Avihu (Aharon's sons) had died bringing unauthorized incense offerings.

These 250 wanted to have the same status as the Levi'im, who did not receive a portion in the land of Israel. By claiming that they too were chosen to do G-d's service, they were, in effect, negating their portion in the land as well. Even though the focal point of their rebellion was not against the land (as it was for the "spies"), there was still a measure of pushing it aside. This might be why the daughters of Tzelafchad mentioned that their father was never a part of any group that insulted the land, even indirectly, and why those that wanted to give up their portion in the land lost it.

There are many times that we do or say things that can have far-reaching effects, even if they are unintended. It is important that we understand all possible consequences, in order to avoid insulting or hurting others inadvertently. © 2002 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**P**inhas is the only one who zealously took up My cause among the Israelites and turned my anger away from them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in my jealousy. Therefore tell him that I have given him My covenant of peace.” (Num. 25:11-12)

No biblical figure is so identified with zealotry as is Pinhas. He steps forth in the closing verses of last week's portion at a particularly critical hour, when the harlotry between the Israelites and the daughters of foreign nations was proving to be a far greater danger to Jewish existence than any attempt of a sorcerer like Balak to curse the Jews could ever be.

What spurs Pinhas to action is an act of fornication between a prince of Israel and a Midianite woman that takes place virtually in sight of the entire nation. Unable to contain his moral rage, and in the absence of action by anyone else (including Moses), Pinhas thrusts his spear into the couple as they lie entwined. Lest we be turned off by the horror of this spectacle, the opening verses of this week's portion - named for Pinhas himself - seem unequivocally to establish the heroism of the zealot.

But not all the talmudic sages were so generous with their accolades. There are many who protested Pinhas's action, since his swift performance - overlooking the slower path of due process and court trial - flouted a crucial element of the Mosaic system of justice.

What happens at a trial, and why is it so important? And what is there about zealotry that is antithetical to justice?

Essentially, a trial allows the judges to hear another side to a story, another version of reality. No matter how balanced one considers oneself to be, the introduction of other points of view inevitably turns black-and-white sketches of events into full-fledged portraits.

A fascinating law in Tractate Sanhedrin rules that in a murder trial, if all 23 judges declare a defendant guilty, he goes free. Unlike the jury system in America, where a unanimous verdict is considered praiseworthy, in Jewish law unanimity is considered suspect. After all, if not even one judge takes a minority position of dissent, how can we be sure the defendant was given an adequate opportunity to have his side expressed?

According to the Midrash, the prophet Elijah is identified with Pinhas, since he acted zealously against the 400 prophets of Baal, killing them without trial for leading the nation astray. And Elijah receives a message from G-d which poetically confirms the necessity of a dissenting voice. After his victory against the heathen prophets, Elijah inexplicably desires his soul to be taken. He flees to Sinai, contemplating the futility of his prophetic mission.

G-d commands that Elijah stand upon the mountain: "A great and strong wind rent the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces ... but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire, a small still voice ..." (1 Kings 19: 11-13)

What are we to make of this small still voice?

One approach is to consider a well-known talmudic narrative that describes how the schools of Hillel and Shammai had been disputing for three years until a bat kol from heaven was heard. (B.T. Eruvin 13b) A "divine voice" is the usual translation of bat kol, but its literal meaning is "daughter of a voice," suggesting something tender, gentle; a voice which might otherwise be overlooked. And what this "small still voice" says is that the schools of Hillel and Shammai are both exponents of the living G-d, but the law shall follow the school of Hillel.

The sages ask: If both schools are exponents of the living G-d, why does the law follow Hillel? And the reply: The Hillelites are modest and gentle, and before they voice their own opinion, they express the opinion of their opponents. In effect, the message of the

bat kol is the message of respect and humility toward the other opinion.

In our Oral Law, both majority and minority legal views are recorded. That is why, among all the texts available in the Jewish library, the study of Talmud is considered the classic path for an authentic understanding of our tradition. The Mishna and Gemara are not a legal compendium listing one legal decision after another, but rather a collection of living dialogues and debates.

Indeed, the Mishna itself (Eduyot, Ch. 1, Mishna 5) explains that the reason for including minority opinions is because no halachic view can be nullified completely; any later Sanhedrin can choose to adopt the minority view of any earlier Sanhedrin. Thus, retaining the minority view - in effect the pursuit of listening - is a vital force in the survival of Judaism.

And, although the Torah seemingly honors Pinhas, we must remember that he is given the "covenant of peace." Ordinarily, peace is held up alongside truth (shalom v'emet). They are similar, but hardly the same. The basic difference is that, when the major interest is truth, one monolithic opinion prevails. Right is right, and wrong is wrong. There is nothing to negotiate concerning the molecular structure of oxygen. But peace is not a one-sided issue. It requires negotiation, listening to and attempting to satisfy all individuals.

G-d does not give Pinhas a "covenant of truth" - he is, after all, zealously certain of the rightness of his cause. Instead, G-d teaches Pinhas the necessity of a "covenant of peace" - the ability to listen and negotiate, to hear every voice - a critical quality for a nation in pursuit of justice. © 1994 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

A portion of the Torah reading of Pinchas is read on the days of every major holiday of the Jewish calendar. This Pinchas reading always forms the "maftir" - the additional reading for the day. And it is also read from a second, different Torah scroll than the main reading of the day that describes the holiday itself. The obvious and correct reason for this use of the "parsha" of Pinchas on the holidays is because the special additional Temple service and sacrifice - the "musaf" of the day for each of the holiday days of the Jewish year - is recorded and described there. In a Jewish world, now far removed from the Temple service and alien to the cosmic reasons for animal sacrifices, this entire additional reading ("maftir") strikes as foreign, strange and irrelevant. However, there perhaps may lie within these "maftir" readings an important and valuable lesson for ourselves, one that has survived the destruction of the Temple and the consequent suspension of the "musaf" sacrifice itself.

The rabbis of Israel have always warned their flock that there are no easy victories in life. This is certainly true in all realms of daily physical life, but it is even more appropriate and definitive in matters of the spirit and the soul. One of the cruelest hoaxes that the modern, progressive, socially-correct but spiritually-empty, forms of Judaism have perpetrated on their hapless and ignorant constituents is that religion, and especially Judaism, makes no hard demands on its believers. The portrayal of Judaism as a feel-good, guitar-playing, kumsitz-type of liberal, secular-humanist faith is a travesty and a tragedy. The synagogue was never meant to be a place of comfort, but rather one of challenge and goal-seeking. The Sabbath and the holidays are days of spirit that have to be earned - that require sacrifice and effort and preparation. They are not cheaply obtained. The rabbis of the Talmud stated: "Torah is as expensive and difficult to acquire as vessels of gold, and it is as fragile and as easily shattered as the thinnest crystal glass." Thus, on the holidays of the Jewish calendar, Jewish tradition demands that we read of the sacrifices that were part of the Temple service in order to remind us of the sacrifices necessary from us in order to achieve an inner appreciation of the holidays and their meaning. The concept of sacrifice as described in the Torah relating to the Temple service, is, according to the insight of Rabbi Moses ben Nachman (Ramban), to impress upon us the idea of self-sacrifice for the Torah and G-d of Israel. Thus, on the easiest and most enjoyable days of the Jewish year, the holidays, we are nevertheless bidden to remember the constant cost involved in remaining a Jew and in achieving the spiritual pleasure and meaning that the holidays invariably bring with them.

We can therefore return to examine and understand why these portions of Torah sacrifices were specifically placed in the "parsha" of Pinchas. For is not Pinchas, in his heroism, courage, selflessness and denial of self-interest, the epitome of sacrifice, both physically and spiritually? The Lord Himself recognizes Pinchas' act of sacrifice and extends to him and his descendants the eternal spiritual blessings of peace, harmony and G-dly service. These blessings, as we all know from our own personal life-experiences, are not easily obtained. But Pinchas, the champion of sacrifice, has earned them and will be able to maintain them throughout Jewish history. Every day that we give ourselves over to G-d's service, that we willingly sacrifice our time, talents, energies and wealth in His cause, is a holiday. The attitude of sacrifice ennobles our days and makes us a special people - a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. © 2000 Rabbi Berel Wein-Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

RABBI LABEL LAM

Dvar Torah

One rule, amongst many other rules, to observe when trying to understand events in the Torah and life in general is; "Things usually get tough at the border of something good and holy". Some examples please!

When Adam and Chava slipped from grace, our sages tell us, it was hours before the Holy Shabbos. Had they made it to Shabbos, let it suffice to say; "history would look a lot different."

We are cautioned by the Chofetz Chaim in his commentary on the Shulchan Oruch, to be careful not to get into fights on the eve of Shabbos. It seems that's when stuff can happen. Shabbos is an island of peace and there are sharks swimming furiously around that zone seeking to put a bite into the holy and wholesome Shabbos atmosphere.

When the Jewish Nation was about to receive the tablets, the golden calf reared its ugly head and we took a left turn that has cost us till this very day. The spies came back with a discouraging report on the eve of the putsch to enter the land. It set us back forty years and a whole generation.

Here we are threatening to enter again. The border nations' hearts are melting with fear. The people of Hashem who cakewalked out of Egypt and left it devastated are about to march in and repossess the land.

What happens? The kingdom of priests- a holy-nation are seduced by Midianite women to worship Baal Peor, an idol whose main form of worship was to defecate before it. A tribal leader openly flaunts his relationship and twenty four thousand people die in a plague before Pinchas puts an end to the episode with one fell swoop.

What was the great attraction of the Baal Peor? The Talmud offers us a searing psychological insight. "The Jewish Nation never engaged in idolatrous behavior except as a way of allowing themselves forbidden relationships". That's how they were lead into idolatry. It's one of the oldest tricks in the book, and more chapters are being written even as we E-Mail.

One of the most important moral impulses we possess is something called "a sense of shame." If we could surf through life without being detected almost all would take the liberty to commit a few perfect, seemingly victimless, crimes. There is a "blessed coercion" of community life and general fear of being caught. Then there is also a natural inhibition against violating our own conscience, a self monitored sense of shame that helps keep us from losing too much moral ground too quickly.

What Baal Peor trained a person to do is to lose all inhibition. One of the most punishing aspects of prison life in the facilities that I have visited (as a visitor)

is the deprivation of private life. The toilet is placed there in the middle of an open cell. Baal Peor opened the door to new experiences by seeking to destroy this noble human trait. After a few brief courses in Baal Peor Institute of Technology, a new student is capable of tossing away his mother and father, Moshe, his own conscience and G-d, for the twinkling eye of a Midianite woman.

We must be on the boundary of something great, if so many of our youth are parking the football on the one-yard line of history. Now, after having marched almost four thousand years down field, there is such a resistance to entering the land, or being caught holding the ball.

The reasons cannot be traced so much to intimidation by the giant linebackers guarding the border. Rather all is lost for the price of a look from a "Midianite" cheerleader combined with a profound lack of appreciation for the price that has already been paid to arrive Jewish in the 21st Century. Without a past and in a "free for all" present, there is insufficient drive to cross the end zone and to win the Baal game! © 2000 Rabbi L. Lam & Project Genesis

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

After Pinhas killed the Jewish man and Midianite woman who were committing immoral acts, G-d applauds Pinhas, granting him a "covenant of peace (brit shalom)." (Numbers 25:12) Can we deduce from G-d's approval, that zealotry is desirable?

Netziv (R. Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin, 19th C.) sees the brit shalom as a counter measure to zealotry. He notes "that the nature of his (Pinhas) act, killing with his own hand, tends to leave a harsh feeling in the heart. He who acted for the sake of heaven, was [therefore] granted a blessing to remain gentle and peaceful." Here, Netziv points out the need of an antidote for zealotry.

Perhaps his idea can be taken a step further. Rather than viewing the Pinhas story as an approval of other acts of zealotry, it may teach the opposite. Zealotry is limited to the case of Pinhas, who received the brit shalom from G-d. In other cases, where G-d does not offer His explicit imprimatur, zealotry is prohibited.

Note that the ancestor of Pinhas disapproved of zealotry. Pinhas is a descendant of Levi who participated in the decimation of the city of Shekhem. His father Yaakov (Jacob) was incensed, and on his deathbed disavowed any connection to Levi's brutal act. (Genesis 49:6)

Note also that Pinhas' descendant, the prophet Eliyahu (Elijah) may have been removed from his position after becoming over-zealous. This occurs when Eliyahu, in this week's Haftorah, declares to G-d "zealous have I been for the Lord...for the children of

Israel have forsaken your covenant." (I Kings 19:10) G-d then indicates to Eliyahu that His spirit is not found in the wind, the earthquake or fire ...rather G-d's presence is best felt through "a still small voice." (I Kings 19:11,12) After Eliyahu persists in his commitment to being zealous, G-d tells him that he will be replaced by his student, Elisha. (I Kings 19:14-16)

In fact, a reading of the Book of Joshua reveals that Pinhas comes full circle. Years after his zealous act, Pinhas brokers a truce between Israel and the tribes of Reuven, Gad and half of Menasheh. (Joshua 22) Some commentaries suggest that only after Pinhas' intercession, an intercession which avoids a split within the Jewish people, is Pinhas completely embraced as a leader. (Tosafot, Zevachim 101b)

The pathway to redemption is not the way of the Pinhas in our portion, but the Pinhas in the Book of Joshua. This pathway to redemption will reach its crescendo when Eliyahu, the descendant of Pinhas, returns parents to children and children to parents, the antithesis of zealotry, as he announces the coming of the Messiah. (Malakhi 3:23-24) © 2004 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

We read in this week's parashah that a man named Tzelofchad had no sons. His daughters therefore approached Moshe and asked that they be allowed to inherit his portion of Eretz Yisrael. Rashi writes that just as Yosef loved Eretz Yisrael and asked to be buried there, so his great-granddaughters loved the Land and wanted a portion of it. Where do we see that Tzelofchad's daughters loved Eretz Yisrael? asks Rav Elya Meir Bloch z"l. Perhaps they just wanted to be land-owners.

When Moshe brought the daughters' request before Hashem, He answered (27:7), "The daughters of Tzelofchad speak properly." The literal translation of Hashem's answer is "Thus have the daughters of Tzelofchad spoken," and the midrash interprets, "Thus it is written before Me." In other words, the Torah itself testifies that the daughters of Tzelofchad spoke precisely what G-d himself had intended to teach. This is the proof that their intentions were proper, for otherwise no person could "read Hashem's mind," so-to-speak.

Chazal say, "Fortunate is a person with whom Hashem agrees." Unless a person has worked on his character, even the simplest things he says and does will be improper in some respect. (Peninei Da'at) © 1997 Rabbi Y. Menken & Project Genesis