

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

**W**ith Pinchas a new type enters the world of Israel: the zealot. "Pinchas son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has turned My anger away from the Israelites by being zealous with My zeal in their midst so that I did not put an end to them in My zeal" (Num. 25:11). He was followed, many centuries later, by the one other figure in Tanakh described as a zealot, the prophet Elijah. He tells G-d on Mount Horeb, "I have been very zealous for the Lord G-d Almighty." (1 Kings 19:14). In fact, tradition identified the two men: "Pinchas is Elijah" (Yalkut Shimoni, Torah, 771). Pinchas, says Targum Yonatan (to Num. 25:12), "became an angel who lives forever and will be the harbinger of redemption at the End of Days."

What is truly fascinating is how Judaism—both biblical and post-biblical—dealt with the idea of the zealot. First, let us recall the two contexts. First is that of Pinchas. Having failed to curse the Israelites, Bilaam eventually devised a strategy that succeeded. He persuaded the Moabite women to seduce Israelite men and then lure them into idolatry. This evoked intense Divine anger, and a plague broke out among the Israelites. To make matters worse Zimri, a leader of the tribe of Shimon, brought a Midianite woman into the camp where they flagrantly engaged in intimacy. Perhaps sensing that Moses felt powerless—he had himself married a Midianite woman—Pinchas seized the initiative and stabbed and killed both of them, ending the misbehaviour and the plague by which 24,000 Israelites had already died. That is the story of Pinchas.

Elijah's story begins with the accession of Ahab to the throne of the northern kingdom, Israel. The king had married Jezebel, daughter of the king of Sidon, and under her influence introduced Baal worship into the kingdom, building a pagan temple and erecting a pole in Samaria honouring the Ugaritic mother goddess Asherah. Jezebel, meanwhile, was organising a programme of killing the "prophets of the Lord." The Bible (1 King 16) says of Ahab that "he did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him."

Elijah announces that there will be a drought to

punish the king and the Baal-worshipping nation. Confronted by Ahab, Elijah challenges him to gather the 450 prophets of Baal to a test at Mount Carmel. When all are present, Elijah issues the challenge. They and he will prepare sacrifices and call on G-d. The one who sends fire from heaven will be the true G-d. The Baal prophets do so and call on their god, but nothing happens. In a rare show of scornful humour, Elijah tells them to cry louder. Maybe, he says, Baal is busy or travelling or having a sleep. The false prophets work themselves into a frenzy, gashing themselves until their blood flows, but still nothing happens. Elijah then prepares his sacrifice and has the people douse it three times with water to make it harder to burn. He then calls on G-d. Fire descends from heaven, consuming the sacrifice. The people, awestruck, cry out, "The Lord—he is G-d! The Lord—he is G-d!" words we say nowadays at the climax of Neilah at the end of Yom Kippur. The people then kill the prophets of Baal. G-d has been vindicated.

There can be no doubt that Pinchas and Elijah were religious heroes. They stepped into the breach at a time when the nation was facing religious and moral crisis and palpable Divine anger. They acted while everyone else, at best, watched. They risked their lives by so doing. There can be little doubt that the mob might have turned against them and attacked them. Indeed after the trial at Mount Carmel, Jezebel lets it be known that she intends to have Elijah killed. Both men acted for the sake of G-d and the religious welfare of the nation. And G-d himself is called "zealous" many times in the Torah.

Yet their treatment in both the written and oral Torah is deeply ambivalent. G-d gives Pinchas "my covenant of peace," meaning that he will never again have to act the part of a zealot. Indeed, in Judaism, the shedding of human blood is incompatible with service at the Sanctuary (King David was forbidden to build the Temple for this reason: see 1 Chronicles 22:8, 28:3). As for Elijah, he was implicitly rebuked by G-d in one of the great scenes of the Bible. Standing at Horeb, G-d shows him a whirlwind, an earthquake and a fire, but G-d is not in any of these. Then He comes to Elijah in a "still, small voice" (1 Kings 19). He then asks Elijah, for the second time, "What are you doing here?" and Elijah replies in exactly the same words as he had used before: "I have been very zealous for the LORD G-d Almighty." He has not understood that G-d has been trying to tell him that He is not to be found in violent

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confrontation, but in gentleness and the word softly spoken. G-d then tells him to appoint Elisha as his successor.

Pinchas and Elijah are, in other words, both gently rebuked by G-d.

Halakhically, the precedent of Pinchas is severely limited. Although his act was lawful, the sages none the less said that had Zimri turned around and killed Pinchas instead, he would be deemed innocent since he would have acted in self-defence. Had Pinchas killed Zimri even a moment after the act of immorality he would have been guilty of murder. And had Pinchas asked a court of law whether he was permitted to do what he was about to do, the answer would have been no. This is a rare instance of the rule, halakhah ve-ein morin kein, "It is a law that is not taught" (Sanhedrin 82a).

Why this moral ambivalence? The simplest answer is that the zealot is not acting within the normal parameters of the law. Zimri may have committed a sin that carried the death sentence, but Pinchas executed punishment without a trial. Elijah may have been acting under the imperative of removing idolatry from Israel, but he did an act-offering a sacrifice outside the Temple- normally forbidden in Jewish law. There are extenuating circumstances in Jewish law in which either the king or the court may execute non-judicial punishment to secure social order (see Maimonides, Hilkhos Sanhedrin 24:4;

Hilkhos Melakhim 3:10). But Pinchas was neither a king nor acting as a representative of the court. He was acting on his own initiative, taking the law into his own hands (avid dina lenafshei). There are instances where this is justified and where the consequences of inaction would be catastrophic. But in general, we are not empowered to do so, since the result would be lawlessness and violence on a grand scale.

More profoundly, the zealot is in effect taking the place of G-d. As Rashi says, commenting on the phrase, "Pinchas... has turned My anger away from the Israelites by being zealous with My zeal," Pinchas "executed My vengeance and showed the anger I should have shown" (Rashi to Num. 25:11). In general we are commanded to "walk in G-d's ways" and imitate His attributes. "Just as He is merciful and compassionate, so you be merciful and

compassionate." That is not, however, the case when it comes to executing punishment or vengeance. G-d who knows all may execute sentence without a trial, but we, being human, may not. There are forms of justice that are G-d's domain, not ours.

The zealot who takes the law into his own hands is embarking on a course of action fraught with moral danger. Only the most holy may do so, only once in a lifetime, and only in the most dire circumstance when the nation is at risk, when there is nothing else to be done, and no one else to do it. Even then, were the zealot to ask permission from a court, he would be denied it.

Pinchas gave his name to the parsha in which Moses asks G-d to appoint a successor. R. Menahem Mendel, the Rebbe of Kotzk, asked why Pinchas, hero of the hour, was not appointed instead of Joshua. His answer was that a zealot cannot be a leader. That requires patience, forbearance and respect for due process. The zealots within besieged Jerusalem in the last days of the Second Temple played a significant part in the city's destruction. They were more intent on fighting one another than the Romans outside the city walls.

Nothing in the religious life is more risk-laden than zeal, and nothing more compelling than the truth G-d taught Elijah, that G-d is not to be found in the use of force but in the still, small voice that turns the sinner from sin. As for vengeance, that belongs to G-d alone.  
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#### RABBI BEREL WEIN

## Wein Online

**A** further count of the Jewish people is recorded for us in this week's parsha. Though the numbers match almost exactly to the count that was reported in the at the beginning of the book of Bamidbar, the Torah nevertheless goes through it again in great detail and with precision. All of the commentators to the Torah have struggled to find meaning in this counting of Israel once again.

Equally troubling is the fact that over the decades of Israel's sojourn in the desert no material change in the amount occurred. It seems that the Torah, early on, wished to inform us of the few in number that would characterize the Jewish people throughout its millennia long history.

The Jewish people, over the last seventy-five years, have yet to make up the numbers it lost during the Holocaust. The count in this week's parsha illustrates the struggle of the Jewish people to survive demographically. G-d promised us that we would be the smallest in numbers of all peoples and at the same time He ordained us to build families and guarantee our existence demographically from one generation to the next.

The low birth rate and the high number of intermarriages among many sections of Jewish society are harmful to our continued existence. Yet the high birth rate and demographic growth within the religiously observant Jewish communities in Israel and worldwide offer us a window of hope and optimism. The simple truth is that Judaism cannot survive without there being Jews. Our task is to provide those necessary individual Jews to the Jewish nation as a whole.

The Torah counts people. Except for the necessary public accounting of the wealth collected and spent on the Mishkan construction and its artifacts, and the priestly vestments, we do not find another detailed count of money or wealth in the Torah. People are the most important items in Jewish life. And even people are never counted directly-only indirectly through coins, sheep, etc.-for what number can truly encompass the value and quality of an individual person.

There is a tendency in the world to count wealth, to see wealth as the most important commodity in national or personal lives. I recall that as a rabbi in Miami Beach decades ago I witnessed hundreds of retired people queuing up in front of the local banks four times a year to have their interest dividend recorded in their savings account passbook.

As is usual, there were people who pushed and shoved and attempted to force their way to the head of the line. People were expendable to these pushers and shovers-the physical count of money, which their savings passbook represented to them, prevailed over simple basic human consideration for other people.

Not so in the view of the Torah. For us people count the most. From the Torah's repetitive counting of the Jewish people, we become aware that people, for us, are truly the most precious commodity. With this in mind we certainly should strive to act accordingly, based upon the values that the Torah has implanted within the Jewish people over the ages. © 2012 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

“**M**oses spoke to the Lord, saying, 'Let the Lord G-d of all the spirits of mortal flesh appoint a person of stature over the witness congregation...'" (Numbers 27:15)

Moses was the master of all prophets and the individual who came closer to G-d than any other mortal in history. Now, after a chorus of rebellions against him, G-d tells him that he is about to be taken from this world without realizing his goal of entering the Promised Land. His response to G-d demonstrates his deep and abiding commitment to his nation. He does not seek a reprieve for himself, but rather a fitting successor for his people.

In so doing, he identifies the area in which he himself failed and the qualities which his heir must have in order to succeed thus defining the *condicione sine qua non* of leadership for future generations, and so leaving a crucial legacy to Knesset Yisrael.

The Biblical words are stunning in their simplicity: "And the Lord said to Moses, 'Climb to the top of this Avarim Mountain (just in front of Mt. Nebo) and gaze upon the land which I am giving to the Israelites. After you see it, you will be gathered to your nation, you in the same manner as was Aaron your brother. This is because you rebelled against My word at the Tzin desert, just as the witness-congregation were engaged in dispute and you neglected to sanctify Me before their eyes with the water...'"(Numbers 27:12-14)

G-d is now exacting the punishment He had meted out to Moses in last week's Biblical reading when the prophet was instructed to take the staff and speak to the rock" but instead, "struck the rock with the staff twice." Although at the time much water gushed forth, G-d proclaimed that as a result of this transgression, Moses and Aaron would not be permitted to lead the nation into the Promised Land (ibid 20:7-12).

Why does G-d now command Moses to take the staff, but only to speak to the rock, whereas almost forty years before, after the splitting of the Reed Sea, when the Israelites also bitterly disputed with G-d over the lack of water, He instructed Moses to take the rod and strike the rock with it?! Why was striking the rock a commandment then and a transgression now? Apparently, Moses himself had pondered this question, and in this week's Biblical portion, he arrives at the reason.

There are two types of leadership: leadership with a staff, and leadership with words; leadership by means of power and leadership by means of persuasion.

A slave people, drilled into submission by a powerful despot will only be moved by a greater and mightier power. Slaves lack the emotional energy and the rigorous reserve to respond to logical thought or inspirational visions. They require a G-d with plagues more powerful than the Egyptian Nile, and a leader with a staff more efficacious than that of Pharaoh's magicians.

But almost forty years have passed since then, years of wanderings in an alien desert and years of protection by a loving Deity, years of commitment to G-d's laws and years of study of G-d's words.

And now, when history is repeating itself, when the witness-congregation is again panicked by the lack of water, G-d adjures Moses: take your staff of leadership, but instead of striking with your hand, speak with your mouth; instead of commanding with the fiery law of a written Torah from G-d on High, try convincing with a song of an Oral Torah whose chorus is composed and sung by the souls of all of Israel; the

Written Torah is a strict law (*dina detakfa*), eternal, absolute and unchanging emanating from the Lord, Creator of the Universe, while the Oral Torah is a soft law (*dina derafiah*), born of dialogue with Israel and informed by the compassion and loving-kindness of the G-d of history.

And so Moses understands that the next leader of Israel must be less a prophet of G-d and more a man of the people, less a conveyor of G-d's eternal law and more of a mediator between G-d's words and the people's needs. Moses is at peace with his realization that if the staff was crucial to bring Israel out Egypt and form a nation committed to G-d and His law, the next leader must use the word - speech and dialogue - to convince, inspire and extract new insights and interpretations of Torah from G-d's partners in history, the nation of Israel. © 2012 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

#### **RABBI DOV KRAMER**

### **Taking a Closer Look**

“**T**herefore, say: 'behold I am giving him My Covenant of Peace' (Bamidbar 25:12). What exactly is this "Covenant of Peace" that was given to Pinachas because he "turned back [G-d's] anger," thereby preventing the "destruction of the Children of Israel" (25:11)? The definition of a "covenant" is an agreement between two parties, each of which commits to something that the other party is interested in. How can a covenant be "given" rather than agreed to? Whatever it was that G-d provided on His end, what was it that Pinachas was committing to? This covenant wasn't "given" until after Pinachas took his stand against adultery and idolatry; was there anything additional that Pinachas was agreeing to as part of this "Covenant of Peace?"

There are actually two covenants mentioned as a result of Pinachas' act of bravery/zealotry, the aforementioned "Covenant of Peace" and the "Covenant of Everlasting Priesthood" (25:13). Rashi understands these two covenants to be one and the same, with the latter referring to Pinachas now becoming a Kohain. (When Aharon and his sons were anointed to become Kohanim, Pinachas was too young to serve in the Mishkan. Therefore, even though the initial anointing process meant that all future descendants would be born Kohanim (without needing to be anointed), since Pinachas had already been born, it didn't apply to him, and he was not a Kohain until he stepped up and stopped the plague by killing Zimri.) The "Covenant of Priesthood" was not a new covenant, enacted as a result of what Pinachas had done, but something that Aharon and his sons had already been a party to (see Bamidbar 18:19). If there was but one covenant that Pinachas became a party to after his act of bravery/zealotry, and it was a pre-existing covenant that he was being allowed to join, we can understand

how it could be "given" to him, rather than there having to be a new agreement. [The "Covenant of the Priesthood" could be referred to as a "covenant of peace" because the Kohanim make peace between people (and the nation as a whole) and their Creator-through the offerings (especially those of atonement) brought as part of their service in the Temple. Pinachas made peace between the Children of Israel and G-d when he stopped the plague and took a stand against adultery and idolatry, so it was befitting that he continue being a "peacemaker" through his new status as a Kohain.]

Tz'ror HaMor, apparently quoting (or, more accurately, translating) the Zohar, discusses the "Covenant of Peace" that was given to Pinachas: "And because this covenant was Moshe's, as he was called (Sh'mos 4:25) a 'Groom of Blood,' G-d said, 'what shall I do [in order to give this covenant to Pinachas], for this covenant belongs to Moshe, and it is inappropriate to give it to someone else without his knowledge.' Therefore, G-d began [by] telling Moshe 'Pinachas the son of Elazar the son of Aharon,' [to which] Moshe responded, 'what about him?' [G-d] said, 'you risked your life many times on behalf of Israel, and he (quoting the words of the verse) turned back my anger from upon the Children of Israel.' Moshe said, 'what is it that You want; everything is Yours.' [G-d] said to him, 'I want that this covenant should be within him (Pinachas).' Moshe said, 'it shall be his.' [G-d] said to him (again quoting the verse), 'say it (end of quote), you, with your mouth, in a loud voice, that you (Moshe) are giving it to him with a desirous soul (i.e. that you want Pinachas to have it).' This is what the verse means by 'therefore, say;' you (Moshe), of your own will, [say,] 'behold I (Moshe) am giving him my (small "m") covenant of peace.' Moshe was the one saying "behold I am giving him," not G-d, for if [it was G-d who said those words], it should have [just] said 'behold I am giving him.' Instead, it says, 'therefore say,' and Moshe said 'behold I, etc.' And if you'll say that it (the covenant) was taken away from Moshe, it is not so. Rather, it is like a candle from which other [candles] are lit yet is not lacking."

From a linguistic perspective, this approach has several advantages. First of all, as Tz'ror Hamor pointed out, G-d had already been doing the talking (the paragraph starts with "and G-d spoke to Moshe, saying," i.e. tell the following to others); there should be no reason to add another "say the following," as Moshe had already been told to "say" what follows. Secondly, we aren't told who Moshe should "say" the second part to. Should he say it to Pinachas (see Targum Yonasan)? To the nation (see Ramban)? If, however, the point is that Moshe should say it, in his own name, rather in G-d's, we know that he is supposed to say it to the same audience he was already addressing (i.e. everybody). Additionally, in the first part, G-d speaks in the first person ("my anger," "my jealousy," "I did not destroy"), while the second part switches to third person

("his G-d"). If the last part is Moshe talking, the switch to third person becomes necessary.

Another advantage of this approach is that the covenant being discussed isn't one first being enacted now, but an existing covenant being extended from Moshe to include Pinachas. This "extension" can be "given" (much as the "Covenant of the Priesthood" was extended) without having to discuss what the mutual agreement entails. The question that remains is what this "Covenant of Peace" is about, why it was extended to Pinachas, and what it has to do with Moshe being called a "Groom of Blood."

The title "Groom of Blood" was given to Moshe by his wife, Tziporah, when G-d wanted to kill him in the lodge on the way down to Egypt (Sh'mos 4:24-25), a title that, after she circumcised their son and the danger passed, she quantified as "Groom of Blood for circumcision" (4:26). Why did she call him a "Groom of Blood?"

When Moshe was first asked by G-d to speak to Pharaoh and to lead the Children of Israel out of Egypt, he responded (Sh'mos 3:11) by asking, "who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh?" Several Midrashim explain this response to mean "it is too dangerous to go down to Egypt (see Sh'mos Rabbah 3:4), to try getting an audience with Pharaoh (see Midrash HaGadol on 3:11), and to confront him (ibid), especially since he has already tried to kill me, which is why I had to run away to Midyan in the first place (see Pirkay D'Rebbe Eliezer 40). In other words, the mission that G-d was sending Moshe on was an extremely dangerous one, something that could not have been lost on his wife. When Moshe was attacked on the way down to Egypt, she assumed it was part of the dangers of the mission, and therefore called him her "Groom of Blood." Although she soon realized that this particular danger was not directly related to his mission (but because of the delayed circumcision), the title still applied, as his mission was extremely dangerous.

How did G-d respond to Moshe's concern about embarking on such a dangerous mission? "For I will be with you" (3:12). G-d promised Moshe that He would protect him, that there was no need to be afraid to accept the mission (see Midrash Lekach Tov). This "promise" did not expire; the Midrash (B'raishis Rabbah 76:1) compares Yaakov with Moshe, as both were promised by G-d that He would be with them, yet were afraid-Yaakov was afraid of Eisav (B'raishis 32:8) and Moshe was afraid of Og (Bamidbar 21:34). Obviously, the promise to protect Moshe still applied 40 years later, well after leaving Egypt. This promise of divine protection was fulfilled whenever the nation wanted to attack Moshe (see M'chilta on Sh'mos 16:10), with G-d's protective cloud descending to protect him. I would suggest that this was the "Covenant of Peace" that G-d wanted to extend to Pinachas as well.

After Pinachas killed Zimri, the head of the Tribe of Shimon, and Kuzbi, a Midyanite princess, he

was in danger of being attacked by their (powerful) relatives (see Ibn Ezra, Rabbeinu Bachye and Chizkuni). G-d's "Covenant of Peace" was therefore needed to protect him (see Midrash Agada and S'fornu). [It would also allow Pinachas to become the "Meshuach Milchama," the Kohain anointed to lead the nation at war (see Sotah 43a and Rashi on Bamidbar 31:6).] This covenant had been enacted between G-d and Moshe at the burning bush, when G-d Promised to protect Moshe ("be with him") if Moshe takes upon himself the dangerous mission of leading the Children of Israel out of Egypt and to the Promised Land. G-d asked Moshe if it was okay for Pinachas to also be included in that previously enacted covenant, and Moshe willingly "gave" his covenant to him. © 2012 Rabbi D. Kramer

### MACHON ZOMET

## Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg

Rosh Yeshiva, Kerem B'Yavne

In Hilchot Dei'ot (3:3), the Rambam explains the meaning of the statement, "All your actions should be performed in the name of heaven" [Avot 2:12]. He says that even voluntary actions should be elevated to the level of a mitzva. Rabbi Charlap quotes a good hint of this by Rav Kook. Moshe told Yehoshua, "Go out and fight Amalek, tomorrow I will stand at the top of the hill with the staff of G-d in my hand" [Shemot 17:9]. Amalek's goal was to cool the ardor of Yisrael, to transform mitzva (commandments) and chova (obligations) into reshut (voluntary deeds). Moshe therefore spoke about the acronym for these elements - "machar" (tomorrow). He said, "the staff of G-d will be in my hand." Machar, staff, is related to the word lehatot, to change direction.

"One who has sexual intercourse with an Aramite woman will be struck down by an extremist" [Avoda Zara 36b; Rashi Bamidbar 25:6] - the extremists do this on their own, even though it is not a strict obligation. Pinchas transformed a voluntary action into an obligation and a mitzva. Therefore we are told, "He took a sword in his hand" [Bamidbar 25:7]. The word for sword is romach, which is an acronym for "voluntary, mitzva, and obligation."

At the time of creation, the earth "sinned" in that it did not grow trees which had the same taste as their fruit. Rav Kook explains in "Orot Hateshuva" that the fruit is the ultimate objective and the tree is the means to the end. Mankind does not like to be occupied with tools but would rather deal directly with the final goal. The Holy One, Blessed be He, wants everybody to find full satisfaction with his or her ultimate mission and thus to have a pleasant feeling about the end goal even while still being occupied with the path. That is the meaning of the phrase, "the taste of the tree is the same as the taste of the fruit."

In general, women are involved in the means to an end, such as organizing the house and arranging family matters, and many women are frustrated by this fact. The sages asked a related question in the past: "What merits do the women have?" [Berachot 17a]. That is, how can they receive a reward for the study of the Torah in view of the fact that they are not directly obligated to perform this mitzva? The answer of the Talmud, that they take care of their sons, bringing them to the schools where they study Torah and the Mishna, and that they give their husbands permission to study, is not enough for many women. They do not want to be involved in the means to the end but in the mitzva itself! This might explain why the Talmud ends by saying, "The promise that was given to women is greater than that given to men." Thus, their reward of the women is greater, because they are involved in the means to the end.

The sages derive the laws of the water libation for the sacrifices of the holiday of Succot from the rules of the libations at the end of this week's Torah portion. We are taught that "whoever has not seen the Simchat Beit Hasho'eiva, the festivities of drawing the water, has never seen a joyous occasion in his life" [Succah 51a]. Why is this event named for drawing the water, the means to the end, and not for the actual mitzva of pouring the water on the Altar? The reason is that it teaches us that being involved in the means to the end is no less important than the end itself.

The Mishna tells us that "for Simchat Beit Hasho'eiva they would descend to the courtyard of the women and make a big change" [Succot ibid]. The Talmud explains that they would build a balcony for the women so that the people would not mix together. At the dedication ceremony of the Ohel Rivka Synagogue in Kiryat Shmuel, in Jerusalem (in memory of the philanthropist Rivka Rotenberg), Rav Kook said that at the Simchat Beit Hasho'eiva in the Temple, which emphasized the means to the end, the women were shown greater respect than the men, since the women spend so much effort on the means to the end. The men, on the other hand, remained below at ground level. © 2012 Rabbi A. Bazak and Machon Zomet

#### RABBI YISROEL CINER

## Parsha Insights

“**A**nd Hashem spoke to Moshe saying: Pinchas son of Elazar son of Aharon the Kohen, turned back my wrath from Bnei Yisroel {the Children of Israel} by zealously avenging My vengeance in their midst so that I did not consume Bnei Yisroel in My vengeance. [25:10-11]”

At the end of last week's parsha, Pinchas acted courageously and zealously to stop an unabashed act of immorality from being performed publicly. By doing this, he stopped the plague that had been sent against Bnei Yisroel.

This event of Bnei Yisroel succumbing to the temptations offered by the daughters of Moav followed Bilaam's stymied attempt to place a curse on Bnei Yisroel. The Ohr Gedalyahu illustrates how tightly these events were interwoven.

The Talmud [Brachos 7A] teaches that Bilaam had the ability to determine the moment of Hashem's anger. His plan was to curse Bnei Yisroel with a plea for their destruction at precisely that moment. Hashem showed tremendous

kindness by not having that moment of anger during the time that Bilaam was attempting to curse. This prompted Bilaam to apologetically explain to Balak (who had hired him to curse Bnei Yisroel): "How can I curse? Hashem has not cursed. How can I anger? Hashem is not angry. [23:8]" With this, a whole different understanding can be found in the passuk {verse} from last week's parsha: "And the anger of Elokim burned because he was going. [22:22]" On a simple level, Elokim {G-d's attribute of justice} was angered that Bilaam was going to attempt to curse, even though he clearly knew that it was against the will of Hashem.

On a deeper level, the Ariza"l explains that it was the anger of Elokim that was going-as we learned that Hashem didn't anger during those days. This forced exit of the attribute of anger was necessary but had its repercussions. The attribute of ahavah {love} inspires the fulfillment of the positive commandments. The attribute of yir'ah {fear} is necessary to abstain from that which is forbidden. Hashem's daily moment of anger instills this necessary yir'ah into the world, aiding us in choosing to follow the will of Hashem. The anger of The Attribute of Justice therefore burned because it was unable to have its proper influence on the world.

This actually led to Bilaam's advice to unleash the daughter's of Moav upon Bnei Yisroel. He understood that with Hashem's anger being withheld, Bnei Yisroel would more easily succumb to temptation; they would sin and bring Hashem's anger onto themselves.

With this, we now have a whole new understanding in the opening passukim {verses} of our parsha. "Pinchas... by zealously avenging My vengeance in their midst," inspired yir'ah in the hearts of Bnei Yisroel. By doing this, he compensated for the lost effects of Hashem's daily anger that had resulted in Bnei Yisroel succumbing to temptation.

"So that I did not consume Bnei Yisroel in My vengeance." On a simple level, Hashem didn't consume them after they had succumbed to the daughters of Moav. On a deeper level, being that Pinchas would compensate for the loss of yir'ah, Hashem was able to forego that anger during the days of Bilaam. Otherwise, Hashem would have consumed Bnei Yisroel in His vengeance by getting angry during that time and enabling Bilaam to place his curse.

We are now in the period of mourning for the destruction of the Temples. It is so important to realize

that Hashem's showing anger is actually an act of loving-kindness and a withholding of that anger can actually lead to destruction.

The Amidah prayer {Shmone Esray} speaks of Hashem, in the present tense, redeeming Israel and building Jerusalem. Every event that transpires in the world, even those and perhaps especially those that seem to be tragic displays of His anger, are actually bringing us closer, step by step.

May we merit witnessing the rebuilding of the Temple, and the coming of the Messiah, speedily in our days. © 2012 Rabbi Y. Ciner and torah.org

### **RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON**

## **Perceptions**

**O**n one hand, the story of Pinchas is straightforward. There was a crisis in the Jewish people, and Pinchas responded to the call, which, given the solution, was not an easy thing to do. He was not a killer, and certainly not one to seek attention. It is very hard for the average person to spill blood, even that of an enemy, so how much more so that of a fellow Jew who happened to be a leader as well. Pinchas really had to push himself to carry through regarding a very difficult halachah that could have had very dire consequences for him:

"Had Zimri separated from his mistress and Pinchas had killed him, Pinchas would have been executed on this account. And, had Zimri turned upon Pinchas and killed him [in self-defense], he would not have been executed, since Pinchas was a pursuer." (Sanhedrin 82a)

On the other hand, there are many details to the entire story that make it less straightforward. For example, where did this crisis come from in the first place? Just after Bilaam was forced to praise the Jewish people for their modesty, how did they go out and act so indecently? After Bilaam was compelled to admit the Jewish nation has only one G-d, how did they end up worshipping idols?

Furthermore, who is this Pinchas character, and where did he come from, aside from his genealogy which the Torah provides? Why was he the one, out of all the great people around, to save the day and be rewarded so fully? Where was Moshe Rabbeinu all of this time, and why didn't he respond to the crisis on behalf of the Jewish nation?

The answer to this question will come at the end of a short intellectual journey that begins with a story, a true story from the annals of baseball. It is a story about how a single, seemingly innocuous moment can, without much warning, dramatically transform one's life forever.

Thousands of fans turned their frustration and angst into a concentrated beam of hatred. That hate was placed on one man who did what any other fan in his position would. It's time to move on, time to forgive

and time for an apology. We all remember the initial reaction that took place as Moises Alou attempted to reel in a foul ball for a pivotal out. The Cubs left fielder maniacally threw his arms down, making the thousands in attendance aware that something tremendous had just occurred.

Mark Prior was in the middle of a 3-0 shutout. He had Juan Pierre at second and Luis Castillo in the box. The Cubs were just five outs away from the World Series, a place they had not reached since 1945. Castillo fouled off a pitch down the left field line. Alou gave chase, leaped into the stands and came down with nothing but frustration.

Little by little, decades of baseball frustration began to boil over. Expletives began to fly towards the area that Steve Bartman, a fan that deflected the foul ball, was sitting. The game that started to unravel was being blamed on a fan dressed in nothing but Cubs gear, wearing headphones so that he could hear the home-team play-by-play. On any other day, a passerby might say, now that is a real fan. Once expletives failed to get their point across, beer began raining in on Bartman, a man who would live in infamy after the Cubs' loss.

Imagine loving something so much, only to see it tear your life to smithereens. Bartman was enjoying something magical that night. His team was on their way to the promised land. Moments later, they were ousted and he was being blamed for the whole thing. You can sense the sorrow he felt reading his statement from 2003: "There are few words to describe how awful I feel and what I have experienced within these last 24 hours. I've been a Cub fan all my life and fully understand the relationship between my actions and the outcome of the game. I had my eyes glued on the approaching ball the entire time and was so caught up in the moment that I did not even see Moises Alou, much less that he may have had a play. Had I thought for one second that the ball was playable or had I seen Alou approaching I would have done whatever I could to get out of the way and give Alou a chance to make the catch. To Moises Alou, the Chicago Cubs organization, Ron Santo, Ernie Banks, and Cub fans everywhere I am so truly sorry from the bottom of this Cubs fan's broken heart. I ask that Cub fans everywhere redirect the negative energy that has been vented towards my family, my friends, and myself into the usual positive support for our beloved team on their way to being National League champs." For Bartman, there is no retribution or apology from fans. The nameless mob that ruined his life will never give him back his anonymity. The 2003 Cubs and Bartman will be inextricably linked, and that is downright unfair. Bartman did what any jubilant fan would have done. I have seen the same exuberant reach for a foul ball hundreds of times since that night. It's time to give Bartman back his life. The man was only guilty of loving his team more

than most. (Bleacher Report, Gabe Zaldivar, September 27, 2011)

Until last week, I knew about none of this, and certainly had never heard the name Steve Bartman before. As Divine Providence would have it, I just happened to be waiting for someone in a place (in Toronto) where this story was being told, and I was totally taken aback by the fallout of the event. I don't know how many people viewed it the way I did, but for me, it was such an incredible lesson about life, especially in time for this week's parshah.

I imagine Steve Bartman starting out his day like any other, except that he was probably excited about going to the game that might clinch a spot for his beloved team in the World Series, after so many tries. His whole day probably revolved around going to the event, which he assumed, win or lose, would have little long-term impact on his life. Why should he have thought otherwise?

Nor did the people he attended the game with ever assume that their friend would become Public Enemy #1 later that day. Why should they have? How many times had they gone to watch a baseball game together, and come home with little to report but the score itself? What are the odds of what happened to Steve Bartman that fateful day happening to anyone? Very, very few, especially given all the nice things people who knew him had to say in his defense.

I do not know why what happened to Steve Bartman actually happened to him. He seemed like a nice enough guy. However, I do know why such things happen to people like Pinchas, and Bilaam for that matter. The single moments that transformed their lives so dramatically, and so eternally, were actually backed-up by trillions of moments that literally shaped their lives and gave them direction. The Midrash says:

"They were crying at the opening of the Appointed Tent' (Bamidbar 25:6): Their hands became weakened at that moment... They cried?! Did [Moshe] not stand up against 600,000 [at the time of the golden calf], as it says, 'He took the calf which they had made' (Shemos 32:20), [and yet you say that] his hands were weakened?! Rather, [Moshe was made to forget the law] in order for Pinchas to take that which he deserved." (Bamidbar Rabbah 20:24)

What does it mean, "to take that which he deserved"? When? All of his life. Where? Everywhere he performed a mitzvah. How? But zealously fulfilling the will of G-d like it was his own. Likewise, Bilaam got what he deserved. When? All of his short life. Where? Every time he either cursed or blessed someone. How? By making sure that everything he did was for his own benefit.

I recall how, during the week of my Sheva Brochos at one of the meals, one of my relatives choked on a fish bone and could not breathe. As all of us sat there stunned and ready to panic, one gentleman, sitting on the other side of the table of the choking

person, calmly put one foot on a chair, the next foot on the table, before stepping down behind the person and applying the Heimlick Maneuver and dislodging the bone.

Since everyone was well, the festivities continued, but the event left an indelible mark on me. I remember how time seemed to stand still as I watched the hero step over the table and save the person's life. But, more importantly, I remember the tremendous feeling of inadequacy I had felt at the time, not knowing what to do save a person's life in such a situation. I had been totally unprepared for such a crisis.

It is no coincidence that people who know CPR often find themselves in situations that take advantage of their skill. It is no coincidence that people with wisdom find themselves in situations that require it. And, it is no coincidence that people who are zealous for G-d find themselves in situations that prove their zealousness, or that people with shady pasts end up in scandals. If indirect Divine Providence doesn't arrange it, then G-d Himself will.

Hence, the rabbis point out that Pirkei Avos, which deals with character refinement, is in the section of technical and dry laws that deal with damages of all types. This is their way of teaching that damages, even accidental ones, are the result of an inappropriate lack of concern for the well-being of others, and if the carelessness itself doesn't result in doing damage, then Divine Providence will create a moment that will allow it to do so.

Hence, though Bilaam saw modesty when he looked down into the Jewish camp, what he could not see was the potential for indecency amongst some of the nation. However, given the right circumstance, as Bilaam advised Balak, that would quickly become exposed and result in both chaos and Divine wrath. When Zimri's moment came around, a lifetime of incorrect thinking made him famous for the wrong reasons.

The same was true for Bilaam. He was handed an incredible moment, one which could have left him with a good name forever. He knew that G-d intended to bless the Jewish nation, and he had the opportunity to be the mouth through whom G-d would do it. However, a lifetime of selfish behavior denied him the spiritual fortitude to rise to the occasion, and instead, he went down in infamy.

In contrast to all of this, Pinchas used his single moment to become a hero. A lifetime of self-work and character refinement allowed him to take advantage of his single moment to become a savior of the Jewish people, and a favorite of G-d. It even earned him the right to become Eliyahu HaNavi, who will herald the Final Redemption. An entire lifetime summed up in a single, eternal moment. It is, perhaps, the most important lesson about life. ©2012 Rabbi Y. Ciner and torah.org