

TRULY HUMANE

by Rabbi Label Lam

HASHEM spoke to Moshe, saying: Pinchus son of Elazar, son of Aaron the Kohen turned back My wrath from upon the Children of Israel, when he zealously avenged Me among them, so I did not consume the Children of Israel in My vengeance. Therefore say: 'Behold! I give him My covenant of peace. And it shall be for him and his offspring after him a covenant of eternal priesthood, because he took vengeance for his G-d and he atoned for the Children of Israel. The name of the slain Israelite man who was slain with the Midianitess was Zimri son of Salu, leader of a father's house of the Simeonites. (Bamidbar 25:10-14)

Rabbi Tanchuma says, "Whenever three righteous individuals stand-up, son after son, for three consecutive generations, a covenant is established with them that they will never cease to be and so we find by Avraham, Yitzchok, and Yaakov... (Midrash Agada)

The Midrash must have noticed something curious. Three generations are mentioned in association with Pinchus when crowning him with credit and a perpetual promise of peace for his descendants forever. Wow! However when the perpetrator of the dastardly deed is mentioned it's only him and his father: no further back and certainly no way forward. Why is that so?

It was at a Bris in Jerusalem many years ago and Rosh HaYeshiva stood up to offer his Torah blessings. Amongst the assembled that day and sitting at the head table was a colleague, a Talmud Scholar, who happened to be the grandfather of the infant who was attending the Bris of his very first grandchild. The Rosh HaYeshiva started his speech by praising him, "Today he is a human being!" People were a little shocked. That's all?! A human being!? That's the best he could say!? He then went on to explain to everyone's satisfaction.

Ubiquitous in the animal kingdom we find that a mother or father of the species has a zealous concern for the welfare of its offspring. You don't want to get between a mother bear and her cubs! Caution is advised when approaching a nest of eggs or young chicks. Who knows what a mother bird wouldn't do to protect her brood.

However, nowhere do we find except amongst humans that there is any fealty or sense of connectedness to grandchildren and from grandchildren to grandparents except in the human realm. Why is that phenomena so?

Perhaps because even in the individual behavior of humans we can take note that when the animal

aspect, the nefesh behamios, is under control there is little thought of past or future. All that exists is the pulse of present passions and an overpowering current instinct for whatever has caught the attention of the beast.

However, when the G-dly soul is dominant, when the rider is firmly under control of his horse, then he is capable of visualizing more perfectly- from whence he comes and to where he goes. The more he is governing the more he can transcend the physical and perceive himself as an actor in a grand historical context. He can appreciate the contributions of generations past and act now on behalf of future and unseen progeny. Clearly Pinchus is praised and gifted with perpetuity for having had that kind of clarity while Zimri who was enveloped in animalism is only worthy being mentioned in father-son mere biological terms.

A somewhat elderly woman who has one child that intermarried and a another that became a Baal Teshuvah and built a beautiful Jewish Mishpacha once confided in me that she came to understand why it is that she feels so much less for her non-Jewish grandchildren while feeling so much for her Jewish Grandchildren. Initially, she had suspected it was some built-in prejudice but later she came to comprehend that, as she expressed it, "When I look at these ones I see the whole past and the whole future. When I look at those I don't see the past and I don't see the future!"

Maybe that's what the Mishne in the 3rd Perek of Pirke' Avos means, "Look at three things and you will not come into the grip of sin, "From where are you coming? To where are you going? In front of Whom are you in the future to give a judgment and an accounting?"

In that sense it could be said that Pinchus was **truly humane!** DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).