

FUNDAMENTALS OF ZEALOUSNESS

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Pinchas: Fundamentals of Zealousness
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Today's Learning:

Kelim 15:2-3

O.C. 55:6-8

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Zevachim 40

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Ta'anit 20

"With Parashat Pinchas," writes R' Moshe Zvi Neriya z"l, "we feel a refreshing breeze blowing." Not only are all of the joyous holidays mentioned here, but we are introduced to the new generation, the one that will enter Eretz Yisrael.

In the beginning of the parashah, writes R' Neriya, we meet Pinchas. He is a zealot on the outside, but he is blessed with the covenant of peace as well (see 25:12).

In this parashah, continues R' Neriya, Yehoshua is named to succeed Moshe. Yehoshua never willingly left the tent where Moshe taught Torah, but he was nevertheless someone that Hashem and Moshe could trust to lead the Jews into war (see Sh'mot ch. 17). Chazal say that the elders of the generation never let go of Moshe and Aharon (see Bava Batra 75a), but the youth were inspired by Yehoshua and Pinchas.

In this parashah we also meet the daughters of Tzelofchad, who not only demanded a share of Eretz

Yisrael (because they had no brothers), they wanted their share to be on the holier west bank of the Jordan, not on the eastern side where much of their tribe (Menashe) settled.

How appropriate, concludes R' Neriya, that Parashat Pinchas should come to encourage us during the Three Weeks. (Shabbat B'shabbato No. 187)

"Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aharon Hakohen, turned back My wrath from upon Bnei Yisrael, when he zealously avenged Me among them, so I did not consume Bnei Yisrael in My vengeance. Therefore, say, 'Behold! I give him My covenant of peace'." (25:10-11)

The Gemara teaches that these verses are Hashem's response to the cynical comments of Bnei Yisrael: "Have you seen this grandson of Puti -- whose mother's father used to fatten calves for idolatrous sacrifices -- and he has dared to slay a prince of one of Israel's tribes?" That comment referred to the fact that Pinchas's father, Elazar, had married a daughter of Putiel, who is identified with the Midianite Yitro. Accordingly, the Torah comes along and connects Pinchas' genealogy with Aharon.

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935) explains: One who wants to be a kana'i, one who zealously avenges Hashem's honor, must have completely pure motivations. Therefore Bnei Yisrael asked: How can someone whose mother was a Midianite and whose grandfather was a priest to idolatry attain such pure motivation? Surely Pinchas' killing of Zimri and the Midianite woman was the product of the bad character that he inherited from that side of his family.

No! says the Torah. Pinchas' nature is entirely that of his paternal grandfather Aharon, well-known as a "lover of peace and pursuer of peace." Pinchas' seemingly "unpeaceful" act was contrary to his nature and was done purely for Hashem's sake.

R' Kook adds: Why did Hashem value Pinchas' act so highly? It was because Pinchas "turned back [Hashem's] wrath from upon Bnei Yisrael." That was no ordinary wrath! Usually, some time passes between a sin and its punishment, but not here. As told at the end of last week's parashah, 24,000 of Bnei Yisrael died in a plague immediately upon engaging in the immoral acts described there. Only when Pinchas killed Zimri did the plague stop.

What was Pinchas' reward? Our Sages teach that Pinchas and Eliyahu are one and the same. His reward was (and is) eternal life. Why? Because just as there usually is time between a sin and its punishment, there also is a separation between a good deed and its reward. This is a separation not only in time -- the mitzvah is in this world but the reward is in the next -- but also in the fact that most reward is reserved for the soul, although the mitzvah was done by the body. However, because Pinchas stopped the plague that came together with the sin, his body and his soul were rewarded together and his Olam Ha'zeh and his Olam Ha'ba were merged into one.

In addition, R' Kook explains, Pinchas' reward of eternal life actually proves that his kana'ut / zealousness was purely for the sake of Heaven. Ordinarily, kana'ut -- closely related to both jealousy and anger -- is a destructive force that can kill the one who practices it. Pinchas' eternal life proves that his kana'ut was different.

(Olat Reiyah p. 394)

R' Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg z"l (Rosh Yeshiva in Berlin and Switzerland and noted halachic authority; died 1966) also observes that a kana'i must have pure motivations. That is why Moshe did not kill Zimri himself. Chazal say that when Moshe rebuked Zimri for consorting with a Midianite, Zimri retorted, "And who gave you permission to marry a Midianite woman?" Of course, Moshe's case was different, for Moshe married Tzipporah before the Torah was given. Nevertheless, in his humility, Moshe feared that if he killed Zimri, he might derive even a tiny measure of satisfaction from taking revenge on the person who insulted him.

Moreover, if Moshe had killed Zimri, cynics might have perceived it as an attempt to erase his own shame at having married a Midianite. Or, perhaps such a motivation might even sneak into Moshe's heart, however subtly. Moshe was afraid of this, so he did not act. That is what Bnei Yisrael referred to when they rebuked Pinchas, mentioning that he too had Midianite blood. They said, "Are you holier than Moshe? He did not trust his own motivations, but you do?"

To this the Torah answers, "Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aharon Hakohen" -- Man does not always know what motivates him, but Hashem does. Pinchas did not do this as the grandson of Yitro, but rather as the grandson of Aharon.

(Lefrakim p. 608)

A related halachah:

R' Yisroel Meir Kagan (the "Chafetz Chaim"; died 1933) writes that it is permissible in certain instances to speak words that would otherwise be lashon hara, for example to save an innocent person from harm or to distance people from interacting with a sinner. However, before one may speak in such circumstances, he must satisfy certain conditions. One of these is that he must be motivated purely by the benefit that either the listener or the subject will derive. (The subject can benefit by becoming motivated to repent when he sees that people avoid him.) However, if the speaker will derive any satisfaction from speaking about the subject, he may not do so.

Certainly, the Chafetz Chaim writes, one may not relate how he personally suffered at the hands of the subject, for example, if the subject harmed him, stole from him, cheated him, or insulted him. Moreover, one may not even relate how the subject once failed to do good to him, for example, by refusing to extend him a loan. (The Chafetz Chaim observes that the latter rule is violated when one

visits a city and says, "You are much more friendly than the people in town so-and-so.") In any of the cases described in this paragraph, the typical person cannot possibly keep his motivation pure.

(Sefer Chafetz Chaim Ch. 10)

A related thought:

R' Avraham Mordechai Alter z"l (the Gerrer Rebbe; died 1948) asks: How is it that in the middle of Shemoneh Esrei, in the midst of asking for all of our own and the nation's physical and spiritual needs, we suddenly seem to stoop so low as to pray that G-d uproot the sinners and take revenge on them? He answers: The Gemara teaches that that part of Shemoneh Esrei was authored by the Sage Shmuel Hakattan, the very same sage who taught, "When your enemy falls, do not rejoice." Only such a person could write such a prayer.

(Otzrot Tzaddikei U'geonei Ha'dorot)

R' Eliyahu de Vidas z"l

R' Eliyahu was born in Tzefat in approximately 1550. His father passed away at a young age, and R' Eliyahu grew up in extreme poverty. He studied under the two leading kabbalists of his day, R' Moshe Kordevero ("RaMaK") and R' Yitzchak Luria (the "Arizal"). When RaMaK passed away, R' Eliyahu was entrusted with the deceased sage's writings. Later, R' Eliyahu settled in Chevron and became its Chief Rabbi.

R' Eliyahu is best known for his classic ethical work Raishit Chochmah. Perhaps more so than any other popular mussar work, Raishit Chochmah delves into many esoteric and hidden matters, for example, a description of the punishment one may suffer in Gehinnom. A son-in-law of R' Yisroel Meir Kagan (the "Chafetz Chaim"; died 1933) relates that his father-in-law used to deliver a mussar lecture to his students on Shabbat afternoons. Once he commented that people think that the description of Gehinnom in Raishit Chochmah is exaggerated, but that is not the case. Every word in R' Eliyahu's description should be taken as it is written, the Chafetz Chaim said.

One of the Chafetz Chaim's students was gripped by terror when he heard this, and he fell ill. For a time, he seemed to be at death's door, but he eventually recovered. He went to the Chafetz Chaim and he said, "Had I died, you would have been to blame."

The Chafetz Chaim rose to his full height and replied, "I say again - everything is exactly as the Raishit Chochmah describes. However, I do regret not adding one thing. If a person knew the extent to which suffering in this world can lessen the need for punishment in the World-to-Come, a person would gladly accept the suffering of Iyov (Job) all the days of his life."

In Raishit Chochmah, Sha'ar Ha'yirah, R' Eliyahu relates that in the month of Elul in the year 1570, he was visited in a dream by the soul of a man who had died about three months before. The soul told

R' Eliyahu, "Man is judged here and punished to a much more exacting degree than most people expect." Elsewhere in his work, R' Eliyahu writes that a certain R' Lapidot told RaMaK that he had seen R' Yehuda bar Shushan in a dream and the latter's face shown like the sun, and his beard glowed like a lamp, because he had never spoken idle words in his lifetime.

R' Eliyahu passed away in Chevron in approximately 1587.

(Gedolei Ha'dorot)

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