

# PURSUE G-D

*by Shlomo Katz*

## Parshas Pinchas

### Pursue G-d

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Today's Learning:  
Moe'd Kattan 1:4-5  
O.C. 586:2-4  
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Yoma 38  
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Ma'asrot 12

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The period between the Fast of the 17th of Tamuz and Tishah B'Av is known in halachah as "Bein Ha'metzarim" / "Between the Troubles." During this period, we mourn the destruction of both the First and Second Temples.

However, writes R' Eliezer Ze'ev Rosenbaum z"l hy"d (the Nadvorne-Kretchnif Rebbe in Sighet; killed in the Holocaust), chassidic works teach that there is also a reason for optimism during this period. We read in Eichah (1:3), "All rodfehah / her pursuers hi'seeguhah / overtook her bein ha'metzarim." The word "rodfehah" / "her pursuers" can be read "rodfei-Kah" / "Those who pursue G-d." (The "K" in "Kah" is inserted to avoid pronouncing G-d's Name, but it is not part of the word.) Those who pursue G-d during this period can "overtake" Him. Also, "hi'seeguhah" can mean "grasped it," in the sense of grasping a deep concept. Those who pursue G-d during this period can grasp deep spiritual levels.

How can this be? How can a period of such sorrow be an opportunity for joyful attainments? R' Rosenbaum explains with two parables.

First, when is it easier for the common man to approach a king - when he is in his palace or when he is traveling? Presumably, when he is traveling. Similarly, it is easier for us to approach G-d when He

is in exile from His "home," the Temple, so-to-speak.

Also, imagine a father who, G-d forbid, lost many of his children. Whenever the father recalls that tragedy, he will feel closer to his surviving offspring. Similarly, when G-d mourns, so-to-speak, over the Destruction, He brings Himself closer to us. (Raza De'Uvda p.144)

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*"Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aharon the Kohen, 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." (25:11)*

Chazal comment: "Justice requires that Pinchas receive his reward."

What does this mean? asks R' Yitzchak Yaakov Reines z"l (rosh yeshiva in Lida, Poland and founder of Mizrachi). Might we think that Pinchas should not be rewarded? Believing that G-d reward and punishes is one of the fundamental beliefs of our faith!

He explains: We read in Yirmiyah (50:17), "Yisrael is like a scattered lamb." The Midrash Rabbah asks, "In what way is Yisrael like a lamb?" The sage Chizkiyah answers in the Midrash, "Just as a lamb that is hit on one limb hurts all over, so when one limb of Yisrael (i.e., one person) is hurting, all of Yisrael is in pain."

The Midrash continues that the sage Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai illustrated the importance of Jewish unity in another way. Imagine several people sitting on a rowboat. Suddenly, one pulls a drill out of his pocket and begins boring a hole under his seat. The other passengers will surely yell at him, "What are you doing?" Can he rightfully answer, "It is none of your business; I am only drilling under my seat"? Of course he cannot.

R' Reines writes: Both sages, Chizkiyah and Rabbi Shimon, acknowledge the importance of unity. What then is the difference between their two analogies? Chizkiyah's illustration refers to unity based on emotional attachment. If one Jew is hurting, all should be in pain. In contrast, Rabbi Shimon's analogy is based on reason, on the recognition that one Jew's improper act can harm all Jews. (For example, writes R' Reines, world opinion often condemns all Jews for one Jew's act.) We are all "sailing in the same boat." If the boat sinks, G-d forbid, we will all drown.

Pinchas' killing of Zimri was an emotional act. We know this because it is the source of the halachah that, for certain sins, a zealot may take the law into his own hands and execute the offender. The law is that if the "zealot" comes to bet din / court and asks whether he should take the law into his own hands, he is told, No! There is no doubt that one who commits a Zimri-like act harms the Jewish people whether his act is judged rationally or emotionally. Nevertheless, the law that "A zealot may strike him down" applies only when the zealot feels the collective pain of the Jewish People, not when he has concluded rationally that the Jewish People may be harmed by the sinner's act. On the other hand, when a court-appointed agent administers lashes or executes a murderer, he may not act emotionally; he must act rationally.

Since Pinchas acted emotionally, emotion clearly requires that he be rewarded. However, the Midrash says, justice, i.e., reason, also requires that he be rewarded [for in the final analysis, he saved Bnei Yisrael].

(Sefer Ha'arachim: Gmul Va'onesh)

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*"May Hashem, Elokei Ha'ruchot / G-d of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the assembly." (27:16)*

R' Zusia of Annipol z"l (died 1800; a leading figure in the early chassidic movement) asks: Why specifically in this context does Moshe call G-d "Elokei Ha'ruchot" / "G-d of the spirits"? He explains:

We read in Malachi (2:21): "For the lips of a kohen should safeguard knowledge, and they should seek Torah from his mouth, for he is an angel of Hashem, Master of Legions." The Gemara (Mo'ed Kattan 17a) comments on this verse: "If a teacher is similar to an angel, learn from him. If not, do not learn from him." But we have never met angels! How can we know if our teachers are similar to angels? R' Zusia explains: Since we have never met angels, we obviously have never had occasion to ask them to prove themselves. Nevertheless, we believe they exist. Similarly, a fitting teacher is someone whom you would never think of asking to prove himself. Rather, his righteousness must be self-evident to you.

In light of this explanation, continues R' Zusia, we can understand our verse. We read in Tehilim (104:4): "He makes His angels ruchot." We see that angels are referred to as "ruchot." Moshe's request, addressed to G-d as "Elokei Ha'ruchot," can thus be understood as follows: "Appoint a man over the assembly who will be viewed by Bnei Yisrael as an angel."

(Menorat Zahav)

Rashi writes of the phrase "Elokei Ha'ruchot": "Why is this expression used? Moshe said to Hashem, 'Lord of the Universe! The dispositions of everyone are manifest to You, and You know that they are similar one to the other. Appoint a leader for them who will bear with each person according to his disposition.'"

R' Yehonatan Eyebchutz z"l (rabbi in Prague, Metz and Hamburg; author of classical works of halachah, Torah commentary and sermons; died 1764) asks: Why did Moshe make this request for Yehoshua's benefit and never for his own benefit? He explains:

Why do different people have different opinions and different perspectives? It is because they have different souls. However, the Zohar states that Moshe's soul included the souls of all of the Jewish people. Thus, the request Moshe made here would not have been applicable to himself.

In this light we can understand a surprising midrash which states that Mordechai was in his generation like Moshe was in his generation. How so? We read of Mordechai (Esther 10:3), "For Mordechai the Jew was viceroy to King Achasveirosh; he was a great man among the Jews, and

found favor with the multitude of his brethren; he sought the good of his people and was concerned for the welfare of all his posterity." How was this possible? How could Mordechai have found favor with all Jews, given the proliferation of opinions and perspectives among the Jewish people? The answer is that Mordechai was, in his generation, like Moshe was in his generation, i.e., his soul included the souls of all of the Jewish people.

(Ya'arot Devash II No. 17)

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R' Avraham Yehoshua Heschel z"l  
(The "Kapischnitzer Rebbe")

R' Avraham Yehoshua Heschel was born on 4 Iyar 5648 / 1888 and was named for his illustrious ancestor of the same name, better known as the "Ohev Yisrael" / "The one who loves Jews" of Apta. The father of the younger R' A.Y. was the first rebbe of Kapischnitz, having moved there in 1894.

With the outbreak of World War I, R' A.Y.'s family, like thousands of others, fled the front and resettled in Vienna. R' A.Y. himself could be seen every day at the Vienna train station, carrying the luggage of broken refugees and helping them to their accommodations. Later, he would secretly deliver money and food to many families.

On the first day of Rosh Hashanah 5697 (1936), R' A.Y. succeeded his father as the rebbe of the Kapischnitzer chassidim. However, despite his new responsibilities, his performance of acts of charity and chessed did not wane. Often there were two long lines outside his door--one made up of those waiting to seek his blessing and give him a pidyon (the monetary gift traditionally given to a rebbe); the other made up of those waiting to receive charity.

With the Nazi takeover of Austria, R' A.Y., like many other rebbes, was forced to sweep streets. However, when the Nazis saw that the rebbe was not humiliated, they released him. R' A.Y. later explained his feelings at that time as follows:

What was the nature of the test with which G-d tried Avraham at the akeidah / binding of Yitzchak? Who would not listen to a direct command of G-d? The answer is that Avraham would gladly have sacrificed his own life at G-d's command. However, to see the suffering of another (i.e., Yitzchak), even when one knows that it is G-d's will, that is a difficult test.

In 1939, R' A.Y. arrived in New York, settled on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, and immediately threw himself into rescue work. After the Holocaust also, he devoted himself to caring for orphans and other refugees, including establishing an orphanage in Petach Tikvah. Because of these and other deeds, R' Aharon Kotler used to say of him, "He is the gadol hador in tzedakah and chessed." Another admirer was the Ponovezher Rav, who said that since the Chafetz Chaim died, there was no one whom he (the Ponovezher Rav) considered to be his rebbe until he met R' A.Y..

R' A.Y. welcomed all types of people, no matter how strange their behavior. For example, when one of his frequent guests said that it was not right that the rebbe was always served first, R' A.Y. placed the man's chair next to his own at the head of the table and asked that they be served simultaneously.

R' A.Y. passed away on 16 Tamuz 5727 / 1967. (The Golden Dynasty pp. 279-296)

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