

# FOR WHOSE SAKE?

*by Shlomo Katz*

## Parshas Pinchas

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We read in this week's parashah of Pinchas' reward for the zealotry that he displayed at the end of last week's parashah. R' Moshe Zvi Neriya z"l (1913-1995; founder of the Bnei Akiva youth movement and network of yeshivot) writes that there are three different motivations that generally inspire people to act zealously.

First, there are people who essentially hate those around them, but they are too refined to express it directly. Instead, they find a religious cause through which they can make their hatred "kosher."

Second, there are people who have a deep yearning to be close to Hashem, but this does not translate into love for people or society. To the contrary, they cannot tolerate other people's lack of interest in what interests them--Torah and mitzvot.

Third, there is the hurt that a father feels when he sees his son sinning. Were the sinner a stranger, the father would be angered. However, because he loves his son and wants the best for him, he is filled with anger at his son's failings.

Pinchas' zealotry was unique, R' Neriya continues. He had no hatred for, or anger at, any Jew. To the contrary, his act was motivated by his desire to ensure the fulfillment of Hashem's Will that Bnei Yisrael be whole. He acted with zealotry to bring about atonement for the Jewish People. We read (Tehilim 106:30), "Pinchas stood and prayed." It was a prayer for the preservation of Bnei Yisrael. Just as Aharon took the incense and stopped a plague (Bemidbar 17:12), so his grandson Pinchas took a spear and stopped a plague (25:7). Thus, Pinchas merited to become a kohen like his grandfather (see Rashi 25:13). (Ner La'maor)

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*"Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aharon the kohen, turned back My wrath from upon Bnei Israel when he zealously avenged Me among them, so I did not consume Bnei Yisrael in My vengeance."  
(25:11)*

Rashi z"l writes: Because the tribes spoke disparagingly of Pinchas saying, "Have you seen this grandson of Puti [i.e., Yitro]; his mother's father used to fatten calves for idolatrous sacrifices, and he has dared to slay a prince of one of Yisrael's tribes!" Therefore, the verse connects Pinchas' genealogy with Aharon. [Until here from Rashi]

R' Yosef Nechemiah Kornitzer z"l (1878-1933; rabbi of Krakow, Poland) explains: Our Sages relate that Aharon caused many sinners to repent as a result of his loving manner. When he would greet a person in the street, the person would say to himself, "If Aharon only knew what kind of person I really am, he would not speak to me," and he would be inspired to repent. When Pinchas killed Zimri, Bnei Yisrael compared his act to the personality of his grandfather Aharon and concluded that Pinchas must have been influenced by his other grandfather, an idolator. This is why the Torah had to expressly point out that Pinchas was a descendant of whom Aharon could be proud.

Why, in fact, did Pinchas not follow in his grandfather Aharon's footsteps and perform outreach in a gentle manner? R' Kornitzer answers:

Our Sages only speak of how Aharon related to people when he met them on the street; even though he and they knew that they were full of sin, he was pleasant toward them. However, we are never told how Aharon reacted if he caught a sinner "red-handed," as Pinchas did here. That situation calls for a very firm protest, just as Pinchas did. (Chiddushei Rabbeinu Yosef Nechemiah)

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*"Therefore, say - Behold! I give him My covenant of peace." (25:12)*

R' Shlomo Kluger z"l (1784-1869; rabbi of Brody, Galicia) writes: This verse implies that the ability to make peace between people is the unique province of certain people. Otherwise, why did it have to be given to Pinchas as a gift?

With this, R' Kluger continues, we can understand the Mishnah (Avot 1:12), "Be among the disciples of Aharon -- loving peace and pursuing peace; loving people and bringing them closer to the Torah." Why does the mishnah say "Be among the disciples of Aharon" and then describe how such a disciple behaves? Why was it not enough to say, "Be among the disciples of Aharon," since we would know from other sources how Aharon behaved? Or, why not just tell us how to behave and omit any mention of Aharon?

The answer is that not everyone is given the ability to love and pursue peace. Therefore, the mishnah teaches: If you want to count yourself among those people, become a disciple of Aharon.

How? This can be answered by focusing closely on the wording of the mishnah. Why is there no conjunction ("and") between the phrase, "loving peace and pursuing peace" and the phrase "loving people and bringing them closer to the Torah"? The answer, says R' Kluger, is that this is not simply a list of how one should act. Rather, the mishnah is teaching that if you wish to become a disciple of Aharon, loving peace and pursuing peace, then you must meet the definition of a disciple of Aharon, i.e., loving people and bringing them closer to the Torah. (Magen Avot)

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*"May Hashem, Elokim of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the assembly--who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall take them out and bring them in; and let the assembly of Hashem not be like sheep that have no shepherd." (27:16-17)*

Rashi z"l writes: Moshe said, "Lord of the Universe! The dispositions of everyone are known to You, and You know that they are not similar to one another. Appoint a leader for them who will bear each person according to that person's disposition."

R' Michel Yehuda Lefkowitz z"l (1913-2011; rosh yeshiva of Yeshivat Ponovezh Le'tze'irim in Bnei Brak) writes that this comment by Rashi supports what the Vilna Gaon z"l writes in his commentary on the verse in Mishlei (22:6), "Train the youth according to his way." He writes that every person has inborn tendencies which cannot be changed. To successfully educate a child, one must work \*with\* his nature, not to try to \*change\* his nature. If one does the latter, the youth may listen when he is young and is afraid of his teachers or parents, but as soon as he grows up he will throw off their yoke. [Until here from the Vilna Gaon]

R' Lefkowitz continues: This is why Moshe Rabbeinu asked Hashem to appoint a leader who could understand and relate to every person on his own level.

Sometimes, R' Lefkowitz writes, a teacher or parent loses sight of why he or she is teaching the child; the teacher even becomes insulted that the child is not listening. "How could the child not do what I said? It is a slight to my honor!" But, the Gemara (Chagigah 15b) says that only a teacher who resembles an angel is fit to teach. Angels, our Sages say, are created to fulfill only one mission; then their time is up. So, too, a successful teacher is one who is completely focused on the mission, not on the teacher's own feelings or ego. (Imrei Da'at p.134)

The Gemara (Ketubot 105b) teaches: "If the townsfolk love a Torah scholar, it is only because he does not rebuke them." Why, asks R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l (Yerushalayim; 1910-1995; one of the leading halachic authorities of the 20th century), do we assume the worst? Why not judge them favorably and assume that they love him because they appreciate his rebuke?

He explains: There are two ways that a father can teach his son. One way is to rebuke him for every

sin. The second way is to teach him Torah and give him a direction in life, all the while setting an example through the father's refined character and adherence to the Torah and mitzvot. The latter method is alluded to by our Sages when they say that Yosef was about to give in to the seductions of Potiphar's wife, when he saw his father's image peering at him.

The same two methods of teaching are available to a leader. In this light we can understand the seeming redundancy in our verse: "Who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall take them out and bring them in." What Moshe was asking for was that Hashem appoint a leader who would teach by example. He would "go out before them and come in before them," and thereby, He would "take them out and bring them in."

This is what the Gemara cited above means, concludes R' Auerbach. If the townsfolk love the Torah scholar, it is because he does not lead through harsh rebuke. Rather, he leads by example. (Quoted in Minchat Avot p.161)

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## **Pirkei Avot**

*It says (Shmot 32:16), "The Tablets are G-d's handiwork and the script is G-d's script, charut / engraved on the Tablets" - Do not read "charut," but rather, "cherut" / freedom, for there is no freer man than one who engages in the study of Torah. (Ch.6)*

In what sense is one who engages in Torah study free? R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l 1865-1935; Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael) explains:

Freedom is man's greatest aspiration. This is why the memory of our own Exodus from slavery to freedom is the most active memory among the collective holy memories of the Jewish People; it is why the sanctity of our holy days is tied to remembering the Exodus [as we mention in kiddush on Shabbat and yom tov]. This is why the Torah declares about the Yovel / Jubilee year, which symbolizes the Jewish People's attainment of its ultimate perfection, (Vayikra 25:11), "Proclaim liberty throughout the Land for all its inhabitants."

True freedom, however, is that freedom which is suitable for man's inner character, freedom which is in his soul. [Unlike physical freedom,] the spirit's tendency toward freedom cannot be subdued by any outside force, and it cannot be broken by any fact of geography [i.e., exile]. The symbol of such freedom is a species of bird which the Gemara (Shabbat 106b) calls a "tzipor dror" (literally, a "liberty bird"). [The Gemara explains that the nature of this bird is to behave exactly the same way in captivity as in the wild.] Because of its nature, it cannot be subdued by any master. It does not surrender its natural tendency to feel free, regardless of the surrounding conditions.

R' Kook concludes: This tendency to be free regardless of one's surroundings should be a part of

every person's life and a part of our national life, in general. [This means being true to our "free" souls,] lifting high the banner of Torah, which is perfectly suited to our souls. From that heroism will come true freedom, and then we will realize the goal represented by the Yovel -- "Proclaim liberty throughout the Land for all its inhabitants." (Ein Ayah)

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Torah.org](https://torah.org) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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