

PEACE NOT PIECES

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

"Pinchas, the son of Elazar, the son of Aharon the Priest, has turned away My anger from the children of Israel, by being zealous for My vengeance amongst them; and [thus] I did not destroy the children of Israel in My vengeance. Therefore, I say, behold I give to him My Covenant of Peace." [25:11-12]

Pinchas killed two people while they were committing a sin together, and yet he was given the Covenant of Peace. It seems contradictory to us; why should killing someone be considered an act of peace, or be rewarded with peace?

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch answers that peace can only be maintained when we are at peace with G-d. Pinchas restored that Peace. What Pinchas did may not have been peaceful, but it restored Peace.

Rabbi Zev Leff, Rav of Moshav Matisyahu, goes still further. He says that our conception of peace is very much mistaken. What Pinchas did, fighting evil on G-d's behalf, was itself peaceful. Fighting is not inherently evil; it depends what the fight is about!

If you have spent time in a university library, then you know it is a quiet place -- very quiet. The silence is strictly enforced, and anyone speaking in a normal voice will be told that he or she is "disturbing the peace."

If, on the other hand, you have entered a Bais Medrash, a traditional House of Study, then you know the opposite is true. When the windows are open, you can tell the difference from a block away! From the outside you would imagine that everyone was fighting, and, of course, you would be right. But at the same time, you will find inside a level of camaraderie rarely duplicated elsewhere -- certainly far exceeding that found in the average university. War and Peace coexist.

Rabbi Leff then brings the point home, quite literally. People imagine, he says (and we know), that "Shalom Bayis," peace in the home, refers to a house where people never raise their voices, where bliss and serenity reign. This, he says, is not Shalom Bayis -- this is a cemetery!

There is harmony and unity, he says, when both partners are thinking about what is best for the home, what is best for the entire unit. There can be strong, even "violent" differences of opinion

about what is best, but when everyone is working towards the same goal, then there is peace.

This is crucial, because we imagine that our neighbors have this sort of peace, and believe that we don't. Not so, says Rabbi Leff. This is crucial, because we may worry and nurse our wounds until we are no longer thinking about the unit, but ourselves alone -- and then peace is truly absent.

The motivations of Pinchas were entirely pure and holy, to such an extent that he could even kill for peace. We, of course, can never approach that level. But if we are motivated by our concern for the unit -- be it the family, the community, or the Nation of Israel -- then we can argue, and still enjoy true Peace.

Good Shabbos,
Rabbi Yaakov Menken

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