

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH G-D

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

G-d told Moshe, "Pinchas son of Elazar, the son of Aharon the priest, stopped My anger towards the children of Israel because he was zealous on My behalf, which prevented Me from destroying them because of jealousy. Therefore, I give him My covenant of peace. (Bamidbar 25:11-12)

This week's parshah touches on a topic that is very controversial: zealousness. It is not an easy concept to actualize. Some would-be zealots make the mistake of trying at the wrong time, while others are not zealous enough or at all when they ought to be. This week's parshah deals with the perfect Torah-sanctioned zealot.

Shimon and Levi, back in Parashas Vayishlach, were zealots at the wrong time when they wiped out the men of Shechem, and were heavily criticized by their father on his deathbed. At Mt. Sinai, except for the tribe of Levi, the Jewish people failed to answer Moshe's call and zealously wipe out the perpetrators of the golden calf.

Is there a mitzvah to be zealous? Well, there is a Torah mitzvah to sanctify the Name of G-d:

All of Israel is commanded to sanctify this Great Name, as it says, "I will be sanctified within the Children of Israel" (Source) Š

and that means avoiding defamation of Torah and G-d's Name ("Chillul Hashem") wherever and whenever necessary, and possible.

Š and they have been warned not to profane It, as it says, "Do not profane My Holy Name Š" (Source) Š (Yad, Yesodei HaTorah, 5:1)

Just to show how serious the mitzvah of stopping Chillul Hashem is, the Talmud quotes:

"There is no wisdom, no understanding, and no advice against G-d" (Mishlei 21:?)

-- and interprets: when it comes to Chillul Hashem, one need not show the proper and required proper respect to a teacher. (Sanhedrin 82a)

In other words, even though, normally, one may be punishable by death for not deferring to one's

teacher when the halachah requires it (Eiruvין 63a; Yad, Talmud Torah, 5:3), all of that becomes secondary when Chillul Hashem is involved.

This is also one of the lessons learned out from Pinchas' act, as Rashi elaborates:

"Š When there is Chillul Hashem, you don't have to show the required respect to a teacher. Therefore, Pinchas taught a law before his teacher by not first asking Moshe for permission [to kill Zimri], in order that people would not learn to permit a non-Jew." (Rashi, q.v. Shmuel Amar Š)

In other words, the Talmud is saying, a situation that misleads Jews into believing the law to be other than what it really is, is a Chillul Hashem. One, in fact, that permits the onlooker(s) to forgo certainly halachic formalities to rectify the situation, like consulting a higher authority, for example.

"BUT," you can hear people worrying out loud, "does that not often lead also to Chillul Hashem, perhaps even greater Chillul Hashem than the original act that evoked the zealousness?" Furthermore, one could ask, if defending against Chillul Hashem is an obligation, then, why is it called an act of zealousness? Zealousness implies something extra -- going ABOVE obligation and taking action when one might have justified looking the "other way." Pinchas only did what every Jew is obligated to do!

To answer this question, one need only look around today. Even among the religious there is confusion about Jewish law, even on the level of Torah law. It is not just that people don't know the law; they often know the WRONG law. And, often they learned the incorrect law from someone else they held to be reliable, to be someone who MUST know the law correctly. And maybe he or she did, but was careless in front of others and gave the wrong impression about what Torah and the rabbis expect from us -- a grave Chillul Hashem.

Sometimes, such people simply draw their own conclusions based upon the fact that no one outwardly makes an issue of what they, or others, are doing. And, everyone seems to draw conclusions based upon the fact that G-d does not outwardly respond to the situation. "If G-d is not upset with the situation, then why should we be?" is a question that many vocalize, even though, halachically, they ARE obligated to DO something, to FEEL something, to find some way to express dissatisfaction with the status quo.

This is a fundamentally and dangerously erroneous way of thinking. For, what does it mean to be a "kanoy" -- a zealot? The Torah addresses this issue at the beginning of the parshah:

Š because he was zealous on MY behalf Š

In other words, G-d's lack of response to the Chillul Hashem is not because He is unbothered by the crisis on earth below. It is because He is leaving room for someone to act on His behalf, to feel what HE feels -- to be willing to act on HIS behalf, for that is the opportunity of living by Torah. This is the goal of being made in the "image of G-d."

In fact, this might be a very accurate way to describe the true Torah zealot: someone who takes his godly image seriously, serious enough to put his own personal biases on the line for the sake of truth. A kanoy can't be happy as long as he knows G-d is not. And, when a person is holding on this level, he can be sure that G-d will be with him in all that he does, just as He was with Pinchas. He will be careful against further Chillul Hashem, and will be energized to act while others simply look the other way, or, feel helpless to do anything to rectify the situation.

Shabbos Day:

The daughters of Tzlofchad son of Cheifer, son of Gilad, son of Machir, son of Menashe from the family of Menashe, son of Yosef, approached Š They stood before Moshe, and before Elazar the priest, and before the princes, and the entire assembly by the opening of the Tent of Meeting, saying Š "Give us a portion among the brothers of our father!" Moshe took their judgment (mishpatan) before G-d."

(Bamidbar 27:1-5)

The end is in sight. The forty years of wandering in the desert are coming to a close. Final preparations are being made for an official entry into Eretz Yisroel; instructions for dividing up the land according to family inheritance have just been given, and receiving the gift of Eretz Yisroel is so real they can taste the milk and honey already.

That is when the daughters of Tzelofchad entered the picture, to stake their claim to a portion in the land. THE land. A land of holiness, a land of Torah, a land on which to develop a special relationship, and through which can access the very special "Nun Sha'arei Binah" -- the "Fifty Gates of Understanding."

In fact, Rav Wolfson points out in "Emunas Itechah," this is hinted to by the Jordan River itself. Actually, something important has been lost in the translation, for, there is no such thing as the Jordan River, at least as far as Torah is concerned. It is the "Yardein," spelled: yud-raish-dalet-nun. The English language likes to translate "yud" as "J" and then change the pronunciation a bit.

Yardein Š Jordan Š Why does it make a difference? We all know which river we're talking about. It makes a big difference to this discussion, because, "yardein" is made up of two parts: yarad-nun, which, literally means, "fifty came down." Which fifty? What fifty? The "Nun Sha'arei Binah," -- the "Fifty Gates of Understanding." As one crossed the Yardein, not only did one inherit a portion of Eretz Yisroel, but they also inherited the Fifty Gates of Understanding as well, of which the Talmud writes:

From Fifty Gates of Understanding the world was created Š (Rosh Hashanah 21b)

But, if the WHOLE world was created with the high level of understanding, then, what special relevance do they have to Eretz Yisroel, and, owning a portion in the land itself?

Because, as the Talmud alludes in many places, and Kabbalah makes clear, the Nun Sha'arei Binah is spiritually indigenous to the land. They're spiritually "cheaper" there. For, as the Talmud states:

Ten measures of wisdom fell to the world, nine of which fell on Eretz Yisroel, and one on the rest of the world. (Kiddushin 49b)

The air of Eretz Yisroel makes a person wise. (Bava Basra 158b)

There is no wisdom like the wisdom of Eretz Yisroel (Bereishis Rabbah 16)

... The essence of Torah Sh'b'al Peh (Oral Law) is within it (Eretz Yisroel). (Pri Tzaddik, Parashas Massey 4)

Perhaps, this is why, in this week's parshah, in a Sefer Torah, the "nun" of the word "mishpatan" is enlarged, and made to look like a "conduit" between the World Above and the World Below. Perhaps it is indicating the true desire of the B'nos Tzelofchad -- to connect up in their own way to the Nun Sha'arei Binah. That would also explain why the parshah connects these women all the back to Yosef HaTzaddik, who had a special connection the Fifty Gates of Understanding.

Nothing has changed today, either. To pursue G-d is to pursue the Fifty Gates of Understanding. To pursue the Fifty Gates of Understanding is to yearn to live in Eretz Yisroel, and when possible, to move there. After all, on the "other side" of those gates is G-d Himself, and reaching this level is all we strive to achieve in life.

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

As I have written in the past, the main theme of this week's parshah is Jewish continuity. This is why there are so many topics that have to do with this idea, such as Pinchas spanning several parshios, inheritance in the land, B'nos Tzelofchad's concern about family extinction, the holidays, etc. You can check the archives for more details about each.

Jewish continuity is also the main theme of current Jewish history, and, quite frankly, ALL of Jewish history. Sometimes it has been an issue of HOW the Jewish people will survive, like during the Holocaust and the pogroms. Other times, like today, in the minds of many "modern" Jews, it is an issue of SHOULD the Jewish people survive.

Such an opinion is not contemplating national suicide, at least on a physical level. They are contemplating "suicide" on a spiritual level, that is, to do away with anything that ties the Jewish nation to its religious past and future. That is certainly the case in secular Israel, where, "a taste of America" on the side of a Pepsi bottle is no longer enough.

What I am saying is that, at the root of the disagreement, is the key issue of Jewish continuity, right down to the definition of what it actually means, and, whether or not is worth while pursuing. This

needs to be explored and understood before a person can appropriately deal with the issue -- something beyond the scope of this d'var Torah.

"But doesn't every nation deal with this issue, at some point or another in its history?" you may wonder.

Not necessarily, and not in the same way. For example, America is a broad term with a broad mandate, one that was founded by men and which is being maintained by men. G-d has expectations from the American people as well, but, they were never asked to receive or keep G-d's Torah, or to bring the world to perfection. They can afford to err and can often recover, somewhat.

However, as we learn from this week's parshah, and, the entire Torah, the Jewish people are not -- a people, that is. Well, at least not first and foremost. They are a concept, considered to be, according to Kabbalah, above the realm of nature. Any other people with a similar history as the Jewish people would not still be here to speak about it.

Obviously we can be affected by nature, or, at least by those who live within the realm of nature. But, that is not because they intrinsically have the power to damage the Jewish people. When the Talmud told Nebuchadnezzar that, by destroying the first Temple and exiling the Jewish nation, he was "grinding already ground flour, and killing an already killed people," the Talmud was making this very point, namely, that, the "natural" world can only affect the Jewish people when we, as a people, forsake the supernatural world.

In other words, there is only one form of Jewish continuity, sanctioned by Heaven. It is the Jewish people committed to Torah and the goals expressed therein, and within our long tradition. The dismantling of true Jewish continuity can only lead in only one direction, one which will continue to threaten to undermine that which began with Avraham Avinu, at least in the short run. In the long run, as the Torah concludes, true Judaism will survive the test of time, and NEVER end, not in This World, or the next.

However, in the meantime, to misunderstand what Jewish continuity is about is to live in rough and tumultuous times. For, this is the way that we are made aware of the truth path to follow, the one that leads to G-d and commitment to HIS master plan for creation. The point of life in This World is to get to the level of understanding where we know in our hearts and minds that we can only rely upon G-d. If we recognize that on our own, well and fine. However, if we choose to ascribe our gifts and blessings to other sources, then, we ask G-d to show us otherwise. That's never the fun way to go about it.

MELAVE MALKAH:

A prayer by Moshe, the man of G-d (Tehillim 90:1)

As the first line of this tehillah makes clear, this prayer was composed by Moshe Rabbeinu, one of eleven that Dovid HaMelech included from Moshe himself. According to the Radak, Dovid HaMelech found an ancient parchment written by the great leader of the Jewish people, and it contained the psalms 90 through 100.

As the Midrash teaches, the words "man of G-d" mean that Moshe was able to elevate himself to the level of a godly being. In fact, according to tradition, from the waist up, Moshe more resembled an angel than a man. In fact, Moshe, after coming down from Mt. Sinai where G-d's Presence passed by him, no longer required food to survive. Like angels themselves, Moshe received his sustenance directly from G-d, as we all will, one day, in the time of Moshiach.

Š My L-rd, You have been an abode for us in all generations.

As Moshe Rabbeinu told Yisro in Parashas BaHa'alosecha, G-d is "The Place." That is, He is not in the world, but rather, the world is within Him! Wherever we go, we are going to G-d, because He is everywhere, waiting to collect us up and take care of us, as only a loving Father in Heaven could do.

Before the mountains were born and You had not yet fashioned the earth and the habitations, and from world to world, You are G-d. (2)

Unlike the existence of man, G-d's has no beginning or end. Though, He operates within time for OUR sake, He actually exists beyond time. Some explain "from world to world" to mean: from This World to the World-to-Come. However, it can also mean, from "Atzilus," all the way to the bottom of "Asiyah," Kabbalistic names of different levels of spiritual consciousness, also referred to as "worlds."

In the realm of Atzilus, G-d's Presence is unmistakably intrinsic to creation; it is the level at which Ain Sof is said to be one with the Sefiros. However, lower down, and especially in our world of Asiyah, G-d seems to be a distant reality for many people, and, unbelievably, people feel comfortable ignoring His Presence all together! Thus, it is our role to proclaim just the opposite, to make it known and felt that G-d is G-d EVERYWHERE, and, at all times. There is no place that G-d is not there, otherwise, that place could not exist.

You reduce man to pulp and say, "Repent, sons of man." (3)

Š Because, as the Talmud says, the world was made for teshuvah (Menachos 29b). To allow for teshuvah, G-d will step back, so-to-speak, for a while and give man some leeway and thinking time to return to truth on his own. However, all such grace periods have their limits, and when those limits are reached and arrogantly ignored, one can expect Divine wrath to bear down in no uncertain terms, and "pulpize" the guilty parties.

For, a thousand years in Your eyes are like a day gone by yesterday, and like a watch in the night. (4)

In other words, time does not have any effect on G-d. However, in less poetic terms, Kabbalah uses this statement to set up a relationship of one day of creation to 1,000 years of history. Hence, the first

day of creation is said to be the cosmic "DNA" of the first one thousand years of history, the second day, the DNA of the second thousand years, and so on. As the Vilna Gaon says:

Know that each day of creation alludes to a thousand years of our existence, and every little detail that occurred on these days will have its corresponding event happen at the proportionate time during its millennium. According to this, you may recognize the Final Redemption, if it comes at its appointed time, in case, G-d forbid, Israel is unworthy ... (Vilna Gaon, Safra D'Tzniusa, Chapter Five)

Fascinating, very fascinating. According to this idea, every single event that occurs in the course of the six millennia of history (we are now in the sixth millennium, in the year 5760 from creation) is not random, but, the result of something that happened during the six days of creation, in a corresponding hour of time. And, if one day of creation is equal to 1,000 years, then, one HOUR of creation must equal 41.66 years within a millennium (1,000 divided by 24).

However, according to Pirkei d'Rebi Eliezer, since G-d only created during the daytime hours, the nighttime hours were as if they didn't exist, at least for the six days of creation, and therefore, we divide by a factor of 12, and not twenty-four. As a result, one hour of a day of creation is said to correspond to 83.33 years within the course of a single millennium.

That is where the fun begins, and the insight begins to emerge. For, with this system, one can trace the events of today back to a corresponding period of time during Day Six of creation -- the day on which man was created, and, the day during which he ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

This has a tremendous amount to say regarding the challenges facing the Jew today. For, inasmuch as most people just take life day-by-day, paying little or no heed to what is occurring in the world around them, except when crisis strikes home, G-d forbid, it is a mistake.

History is about tikun-Olam -- rectification of the world, and specifically, of the mistake of eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. And, if history repeats itself, and we are saying that it does BIG TIME, then, one ought to know to which events his "hour" of creation corresponds, for to remain ignorant of this information is to remain ignorant of the opportunity of a lifetime to join with G-d in partnership, as Pinchas did, to right the wrong, and bring creation to fulfillment.

Have a great Shabbos,
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