

TALK ABOUT MAKEOVERS

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

G-d told Moshe, "Pinchas, the 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." (Bamidbar 25:10-11)

Talk about your come-from-behind victories! There was Pinchas out in the proverbial left field of history, possessing the proper genealogy but lacking the proper timing to be from the chosen of the chosen, the priesthood. His father was a kohen and his grandfather had been a kohen, but having been born before the giving of the Torah, he lacked the possibility to be a kohen himself.

However, what he had possessed was a tremendous love for G-d, Torah, and his people, and unbeknownst to him at the time, it was to be his ticket into the kehunah forever. Isn't it amazing how far an act of zealousness on behalf of G-d can go - providing it is really on behalf of G-d.

In fact, that is the first lesson we learn from this week's parshah that must be pointed out, especially in this day-and-age of suicide bombers. It is one thing to be a zealot, but it is something altogether different to be a zealot on behalf of G-d, as we learned from the episode of Shimon and Levi when they wreaked revenge on the city of Shechem after the violation of their sister, Dinah (Bereishis 34:1). Apparently their intentions, as noble as they had been, had not been completely for G-d's sake.

As we see today, that a person is prepared to die in the midst of an act of zealousness is no proof that he is completely l'shem Shamayim. In fact, very often when acts of zealousness have been necessary on behalf of Torah, it has been the leaders of the communities who were asked to carry them out, and not the laymen or less-learned people, to make sure that it was done on behalf of G-d.

When people who know little halachah and who have yet to fully refine their character traits get 'angry' on behalf of truth, it can be hard to distinguish their own personal sentiments from those necessary on behalf of the pure cause. Thus, the zealous act under such circumstances can be at best partially on G-d's behalf and at worst, completely on the would-be zealot's own behalf.

This is not to say that 'ordinary' people can't rise to the occasion and perform great acts of courage and self-sacrifice. However, when it comes to the Torah definition of 'kana'os' (zealousness), as

alluded to in this week's parshah, this is only the starting point. The remaining requirement is the ability to become a pure extension of G-d's will on earth, which can add decades of spiritual growth and character perfecting.

Thus, for Pinchas to have been able to reach this level means that he must have been quite special before he stepped into the picture. In fact, for all we know, he was one of those 'things' that Divine Providence 'set aside' from the beginning of history for a critical moment just like this one. This could help explain what the Ba'al HaTurim reveals:

Therefore, I give him My Covenant of Peace (Shalom). (Bamidbar 25:12)

...Another explanation of the severed 'vav' (the letter 'vav' if 'shalom' is cut) is that Pinchas is Eliyahu. Likewise, we find that 'Eliyahu' is written without the 'vav' (Aleph-lamed-yud-heh) and 'Ya'akov' is written with its 'vav' (Yud-ayin-kuf-VAV-bais), which is said to have been taken from Eliyahu as a surety until Moshiach comes and redeems his sons. This is what it says, "Ya'akov will exult, Israel will rejoice (yismach)" (Tehillim 14:7), the letters of 'yismach' being that of 'Moshiach,' for there will be rejoicing in the Days of Moshiach when the 'vav' will be returned to Eliyahu making it complete. (Ba'al HaTurim)

However, a few questions now arise for which it would be nice to receive answers. First, how does one go from being Pinchas ben Elazar ben Aharon HaKohen to Eliyahu HaNavi, the prophet who will herald in the coming of Moshiach Ben Dovid and the Final Redemption? Second, when did Pinchas make the transition, and why? Third, how can one function as a kohen if the law is that a kohen who kills a person can no longer do so?

Shabbos Day:

Elazar the son of Aharon took a daughter of Potiel for a wife and Pinchas was born. (Shemos 6:25)

To appreciate who Pinchas is, you have to appreciate who he was. The posuk just quoted is not from this week's parshah, but perhaps it is linked to it by the fact that the parshah went out of its way to mention Pinchas' family line. It certainly provides important insight into the origin of Pinchas himself, as we see:

Regarding Pinchas' birth it says, "Elazar the son of Aharon took a daughter of Potiel for a wife and Pinchas was born" (Shemos 6:25). On this, Chazal say: Potiel - this is Yosef, 'sh'patpet' (controlled) his yetzer hara; this is Yisro, 'sh'patem' (fattened) calves for idol worship. This is the sod: when Pinchas was born, he incorporated two soul-sparks. This is the meaning 'Potiel,' which is similar to 'tippin' (drops), for he was from two soul-drops, one spark from the root of Yosef HaTzaddik and the second spark was from the side of Yisro. This level that incorporates these two souls is called 'Pinchas.' ...

Thus, we find that Pinchas received a soul-spark from Yisro, which was the level of Ohr P'nimi of the Nefesh of Adam HaRishon from Atzilus. After that, Nadav and Avihu died because they brought the unauthorized Incense-Offering (Vayikra 10:1), and when Pinchas killed Zimri, he merited the souls of Nadav and Avihu, which were the Ohr Makif of Adam of Atzilus. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Chapter 32)

Thus, Pinchas the person was a real composite of illustrious spiritual ancestry, some of which he inherited at birth, some of which he merited through his act of zealousness. Receiving Nadav and Avihu AFTER having killed Zimri can explain how Pinchas could, become a kohen after the giving of the Torah, and second, to continue to function in the role of kohen after having killed a person.

In other words, in an obviously very real sense, by receiving the souls of Nadav and Avihu who had been kohanim in the first place, Pinchas became the continuation of their lives, and thus merited the kehunah himself. Furthermore, it had been the combination of soul-sparks from Yosef and Yisro called 'Pinchas' who had killed Zimri and Cosbi, not the new hybrid of souls that resulted from the act.

In fact, it was more crowded within Pinchas than that:

Thus, we find that four levels were in Pinchas. The first was that of the Nefesh of Pinchas with which he was born, a single soul even though it was the combination of two drops, one from Yosef and one from Yisro. The second level was the Nefesh of Nadav and Avihu, which came into him while he was already alive... The third was a Nefesh called 'Eliyahu HaTishbi' from the root of Gad, and the fourth level was 'Eliyahu' from the root of Binyomin. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Chapter 32)

Ahah! Well, as long as Pinchas could handle all that Heavenly help and maintain a sense of identity, which he seemed to have no problem doing. In fact, he stopped being Pinchas as a result, and instead became Eliyahu HaNavi, though with intermittent sent backs. For:

Thus, in the incident with Zimri he merited the ibur of Nadav and Avihu, as mentioned in the Zohar (Pinchas 217a), but he lost the ibur as a result of the sin from the daughter of Yiftach. This is why the vav is 'cut,' to represent the sefirah of Yesod, which is called 'Brisi Shalom.' It was actually 'cut' when he lost the Shechinah and the ibur of Nadav and Avihu. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Chapter 32)

Rav Chaim Vital is referring to an episode in Tanach that happened while Pinchas was still functioning as Pinchas, during the days of the 'Judges,' and specifically the judge Yiftach (2788-2792/972-968 BCE) - over 300 years since Pinchas killed Zimri!

If you recall from the Haftarah for Parashas Chukas, in advance of Yiftach's battle with the people of Ammon, he made a vow:

Yiftach declared a vow to G-d, and said, "If You will indeed deliver the Children of Ammon into my hand, then it will be that whatever emerges - what will emerge from the doors of my house - toward me when I return in peace from the Children of Ammon, it shall belong to G-d and I shall offer it up as an Elevation-Offering." (Shoftim 11:30-31)

Unfortunately, as wonderful an idea as Yiftach's vow was, it resulted in catastrophe instead:

Yiftach arrived at Mitzpah, to his home, and behold, his daughter was coming out toward him with drums and dances. She was only a child; he did not have another daughter or son of his own. When he saw her, he tore his clothes and said, "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me to my knees, and you have joined those who trouble me. I have opened my mouth to G-d and I cannot recant!" (Shoftim 11:34-35)

In other words, though Yiftach had intended to sacrifice an animal to G-d in thanks for his victory over the Ammonites, instead his daughter emerged first from his house, and instead she, Yiftach's only child, became his sacrifice of thanks to G-d. He didn't slaughter her of course, but instead she remained an unmarried woman the rest of her life since she was holy to G-d from that point onward.

This became a practice in Israel: From year to year the daughters of Israel would go and lament with the daughter of Yiftach HaGiladi, four days of the year. (Shoftim 11:39)

So, what does this tragic story have to do with Pinchas? This:

Later in history, when the incident of the daughter of Yiftach HaGiladi occurred, they (Eliyahu and Yiftach) were both punished. For, as Chazal say, Yiftach was a judge and he did not want to come to Eliyahu to cancel his vow, and Eliyahu did not want to come to him, for he said, "The one who is suffering must come to the doctor" and thus between the two of them, the daughter of Yiftach went. Yiftach, who was directly involved in the incident was punished, and as a result, everywhere he went he lost limbs, as it says, "They buried him in the cities of Gilad" (Shoftim 12:7) - in the plural. Eliyahu was punished by the departure of the Shechinah, as Chazal say (Bereishis Rabbah 60:3) on the posuk, "And Pinchas the son Elazar had been the supervisor over them in former times, for G-d was with him (I Divrei HaYomim 9:20), which is talking about Pinchas. Thus, it seems that Pinchas had been the 'supervisor' over them, but no longer. After the Nefesh of Nadav and Avihu that had been in him, the b'ibur was removed from him and it later reincarnated into Shmuel HaNavi, as we will explain. This is the sod of what Chazal say: The 'vav' of 'Brisi Shalom' (Bamidbar 25:12) is cut. They also say in the Zohar (Acharei Mos), that the "yud" of 'Pinchas' is small (Bamidbar 25:11). (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Chapter 32)

However, we are not finished yet. For, Pinchas, or Eliyahu, was still destined to make one more final dramatic return, one that would seal his fate as the one to herald in the redemption from that time onward:

SEUDAH SHLISHIS:

"The covenant of the priesthood will be his and his descendants forever, because he was zealous for his G-d, and atoned for the Children of Israel." (Bamidbar 25:13)

Rav Chaim Vital, in the name of the Arizal, continues:

After this, his name changed to "Eliyahu HaTishbi." Nadav and Avihu had not been rectified in him, and Pinchas, himself from the side of Yisro, had been involved in the sin of the daughter of Yiftach. Eliyahu from the tribe of Binyomin had only been in him b'ibur to join together the other souls. Thus, what remained as the main part was Eliyahu from the root of Gad, and therefore he could no longer be called "Pinchas," but rather, "Eliyahu HaTishbi," alluding that his soul was from the tribe of Gad. Prophecy returned to him after he was called "Eliyahu HaTishbi," and after Shmuel had died so that Nadav and Avihu could return to him b'ibur during the incident of Mt. Carmel. At that time, the people fell on their faces and said, "Hashem is Elokim" (I Melachim 18:20-29). When they said, "Hashem is Elokim," they [Nadav and Avihu] were forgiven for their sin of "cutting off their plantings" when they blemished the Divine Presence. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Chapter 32)

Therefore, what Eliyahu lost he regained: the souls of Nadav and Avihu. With the souls returned his prophecy, never to leave him again. His act of kana'os at Mt. Carmel when he upstaged the priests of Ba'al brought him, the souls of Nadav and Avihu, and the generation of that time, tikun. It was a happy ending to an almost tragic story, and a dramatic finale to a very long and illustrious career.

In the year 3043, (almost 600 years!) from the time Pinchas acted on behalf of G-d to kill Zimri and save the Jewish people from themselves, Eliyahu HaNavi ascended to Heaven in a fiery chariot (I Melachim 2:11).

And, in case you were wondering:

He (Eliyahu) found respite in the cave at Har Chorev, until he went up in a windstorm to Heaven. It was Eliyahu HaTishbi from the tribe of Gad who ascended to Heaven, and he did not descend again. However, Eliyahu from the tribe of Binyomin, reincarnated into the one mentioned in the posuk, "And Ya'areshyah, Eliyahu, and Zichri were the sons of Yerucham" (I Divrei HaYomim 8:27). Later, when he died, he ascended to join Eliyahu HaTishbi who had ascended. It is Eliyahu from the tribe of Binyomin who ascends and descends constantly to perform miracles for the righteous, and to speak with them. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Chapter 32) Not to mention stops by Seder Night at the houses of Jews around the world towards the end of the Seder when we open the door and recite 'Sh'foch chamasecha."

However, in Yemos HaMoshiach, he will have an additional role to fulfill, once redemption becomes a thing of the past, may that be soon in our time:

In the "End of Days" in the generation of Moshiach, Moshe will return to teach Torah to Israel and will still be of "uncircumcised lips." However, Eliyahu, who will be "chai," will be his interpreter, and this is the sod of the posuk, "Pinchas the son of Elazar son of Aharon HaKohen" (Bamidbar 25:11). This is as it is written, "If [one is drawn] to scoffers, he will scoff" (Mishlei 4:37): when they will need a translator for Moshe, Eliyahu who will be "chai" will translate and be Moshe's interpreter. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Chapter 36)

As some more Kabbalistic commentators point out, "uncircumcised lips" has always meant that Moshe's understanding of Torah is on too high a level to be expressed to the average Jew. In the desert, it required Aharon HaKohen to learn it from Moshe, and step it down for the masses. Apparently, Eliyahu will act in a similar function in Yemos HaMoshiach, a trait that he inherited from Pinchas, the grandson of Aharon HaKohen.

And there you have it: a brief overview of the life and times of Eliyahu HaNavi, nee Pinchas ben Elazar ben Aharon HaKohen.

MELAVE MALKAH:

It happened after these events: The son of the woman, the landlady, became ill. His illness became very serious until there was no more breath left in him. She said to Eliyahu, "What is there between me and you, O man of G-d, that you have come to me to call attention to my sins and to cause my son to die!" (I Melachim 17:17-18)

So begins one of the most moving stories in Tanach, which also involves Eliyahu as well. Unfazed, the prophet told the woman,

"Give me your son."

Which she did, and Eliyahu carried the dead boy upstairs to where he was staying, and laid him on his own bed. Then he turned Heavenward and said,

"G-d, my G-d, have you brought harm even upon the widow with whom I dwell, to cause her son to die?"

Then, he stretched himself over the boy three times and called out to G-d,

"O G-d, my G-d, please let this boy's soul come back within him."

And, He did. In the end, the boy came back to life, and Eliyahu brought him to his mother who was, needless to say, beside herself with joy. She told him,

"Now I know through this that you are a man of G-d, and that the word of G-d in your mouth is true (emes)."

End of story, right?

Wrong.

It seems to me that the two of them reincarnated into Eliyahu of Binyomin. The level called the "Drop of Yosef," Eliyahu gave to Yonah ben Amitti HaTzarafis when he revived him (I Melachim 17:17-23). This is the sod of what is written in the Zohar: It was taught: Yonah came from the legion of Eliyahu,

which is why he is called, "ben Amitti" ("son of Truth"), as it says, "and that the word of G-d in your mouth is true!" (I Melachim 17:24), (Vayakhel 197a), (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Chapter 32)

That's right, Yonah, as in Yonah and the big fish! The one who was sent by G-d to warn Nineveh about impending doom, but who chose instead to run away to Tarshish, only to be thrown overboard when the ocean became violent on his account. That Yonah.

Amazingly, not only did he die and rejoin the living, but it was also said of him:

This is also the sod of what Chazal write: It was taught in the school of Eliyahu, "The lad that I revived was Moshiach ben Yosef."

As in Moshiach Ben Yosef - who is supposed to come in advance of Moshiach Ben Dovid and pave the way for the Final Redemption and Yemos HaMoshiach. Thus, it seems, no matter which way Eliyahu turns, he is associated with redemption. With the way things are shaping up around the world for the Jewish people now, we may be seeing more of him before we know it.

Have a wonderful Shabbos,
Pinchas Winston