

# PINCHAS: MAN OF PEACE

*by Rabbi Aron Tendler*

*"Pinchas's courage closed the gap between Kllal Yisroel's moral stature and their immoral behavior."*

The first half of Parshas Pinchas deals with four basic topics:

1. Pinchas's appointment to the priesthood as a reward for killing Zimri and the Midianite princess.
2. The commandment to Moshe to wage war against Midian, and to take a census of the Bnai Yisroel.
3. The division of the Land of Israel by lottery.
4. The story of the daughters of Tzelafchad.

The second half of Parshas Pinchas details the various public sacrifices brought throughout the year. What is the underlying theme of the first half of the Parsha, and how does it relate to the second half?

Pinchas has been held up throughout history as the quintessential zealot. It is "Pinchas the Zealot", or the "zealousness of Pinchas". He is never referred to as "Pinchas the Man of Peace", or "Pinchas the Kohain". Yet, our understanding of Pinchas, and the manner in which he is described in the Torah and the Medresh, is specifically as the Kohain or the Man of Peace. Even according to the Talmud that Pinchas and Eliyahu Hanavi were the same person, our view of Eliyahu is far more the loving helper of Kllal Yisroel than the fiery prophet who zealously confronted the evil monarchs of his generation. Who was Pinchas and why did he earn G-d's covenant of peace?

Pinchas was the son of Elazar, the grandson of Aharon, and he was not selected to be a Kohain. At the original appointment of Aharon and his sons to the priesthood, Pinchas was left out. Pinchas was already a known personality at that time. He is mentioned as one of the individuals who learned Torah directly from Moshe, and then went out to teach the rest of the Jews. Yet, Pinchas was not appointed to the priesthood. For 39 years, Pinchas did not say a word. For the entire time in the desert, Pinchas lovingly accepted Hashem's decree that he and his children were not to be Kohanim. He continued to function as a Layvie serving beneath his Grandfather and uncles. He completely subjugated himself to the teachings of his Great Uncle Moshe, to the degree that he was among those chosen to teach Hashem's word to the rest of the nation.

Pinchas was not a Korach. Pinchas did not rally against the seemingly arbitrary injustices of divine selection. Pinchas was a man of humility of the highest order, worthy of receiving prophecy. Pinchas exhibited a single-minded devotion to Hashem, His Torah, and those whom G-d had chosen to be

His teachers. Pinchas displayed self control and courage motivated by a clarity of vision and purpose. It was this devotion which became the "zealousness" of last week's Parsha. It is this devotion which earned him G-d's eternal covenant of peace.

G-d's command to Moshe to wage war with the Midianites was a direct response to Pinchas's courage and devotion. Pinchas was a new Nachshon Ben Aminadav (a great uncle to Pinchas from his grandmother's side). Just as Nachshon's courage and devotion to Hashem and Moshe led the Bnai Yisroel through the parting of the waters, so too Pinchas's courage closed the gap between Kllal Yisroel's moral stature and their immoral behavior.

However, in many ways Pinchas's zealousness was far more profound than Nachshon's courage. At the parting of the Yam Suf, Nachshon, along with the rest of the Jews, heard Moshe say in the name of G-d to go into the sea. With single-minded devotion, Nachshon led the way into the sea, even though the sea had not yet parted. Pinchas, on the other hand, acted on his own. With the confidence that he was doing as he had been taught to understand the will of G-d, Pinchas took action, even though Moshe and the other elders did nothing. It is this kind of zealousness, born from a passion to do the will of G-d regardless of personal danger or societal sanction, which earned him G-d's eternal covenant of peace.

Moshe was instructed to count the Bnai Yisroel in preparation for entering Eretz Yisroel. This census followed the terrible plague resulting from the incident of Zimri and the Midianite woman in which 24,000 men died. The census was also to identify the men who would go into battle against Midian. These warriors would have to be strong and courageous by the standards of Pinchas. They would have to wage a battle against immorality and the influences of assimilation. They were to be the generation that would have to function after Moshe had died, without hearing the word of G-d directly from Moshe. They had to be like Pinchas: strong, fearless, devoted, and completely subject to the teachings of the Torah, as taught by the Rabbis. However, in the absence of Moshe, they would have to have the courage to make decisions for themselves based upon what they had been taught. They would have to become the kind of leaders who are willing to stand and be counted when no one else is taking responsibility to act. They would have to be like Pinchas.

Once the Bnai Yisroel were counted, Moshe turned his attention to dividing up Israel. Only after Moshe knew that the next generation could follow the ways of Pinchas was the land apportioned. Moshe knew that crossing the Yarden would usher in a new era in the relationship between Hashem and his children. The challenges facing the nation would be far greater than anything they had yet encountered. They would have to prove their devotion and commitment while standing alone, unprotected by the overt evidence of Hashem's constancy. In parceling out the land, he brought the Jews one step closer to their greatest challenge. Therefore, he could only proceed after the new generation could be counted on to be like Pinchas.

The daughters of Tzelafchad, as their father's only heirs, requested their father's portion in the land

of Israel. We are told that these five women were great in their righteousness and humility. They too understood that their destiny was tied to the new era and the challenges that living in Eretz Yisroel would bring. Therefore, they exhibited their trust and acceptance of Torah and the Halachik process by approaching Moshe and presenting their request. It is a singular example of how the Bnai Yisroel were intended to interact with their Torah leadership. The survival of the nation depended on everyone, not just the men, expressing their subjugation to Hashem's Torah as taught by Moshe and all the subsequent rabbis. Therefore, the story of five women, the daughters of Tzelafchad, is recorded to show the extent and application of that devotion. They too recognized the need to stand and be counted. They too accepted their unique place within the makeup of the nation, regardless of the outcome. In posing the question to Moshe, they opened themselves up to the possibility of hearing, "no". However that didn't deter them. They proceeded to pose the question with the full intention of lovingly accepting the decree, regardless of the outcome. They understood the zealousness of Pinchas.

The second half of Parshas Pinchas reviews all the public sacrifices offered in the Mishkan and the Temple. Its placement in this week's Parsha is profoundly important. The daily offerings and sacrifices framed the workings of the Bais Hamikdash. The Kohanim and the Leviyim were designated from among the nation to service the people and facilitate these offerings. These public offerings were the ongoing link between a dispersed nation (within Eretz Yisroel) and the manifest presence of G-d. As the people were about to enter a new era in their functioning as a nation, the impact of G-d's presence in their daily lives would be tested. The public sacrifices would be a major component in strengthening and maintaining their resolve to be like Pinchas. It was not the private offerings that would bind them as a nation. It was the public offerings that unified the people beneath the banner of national devotion and acceptance.

Pinchas didn't kill Zimri and the Midianite princess because of personal outrage. He raised his spear and endangered his own life because the nation was in danger. Only as a humble but zealous servant of Hashem could Pinchas undertake to save his people. Only as the grandson of Aharon, the son of Elazar, and the student of Moshe, could Pinchas create a covenant of peace and wholeness with G-d. The daily offerings were the framework that allowed for a Pinchas to mature and become a priest. The daily offerings, presented by the Kohanim on behalf of a devoted nation, maintain the connection with G-d that stands as a constant barrier against assimilation.

### The Nine Days

The Nine days begin on Rosh Chodesh Av, the evening of July 23, and ends Sunday evening , Aug. 2. This interval of time imitates the period of "shiva" with some of its restrictions.

**Washing and Cleaning Clothing:** It is forbidden to wash or iron clothing during the 9 Days, even if it is done by a non-Jew. You may give clothing to the cleaners before the 9 Days, even if they will be cleaned during the 9 days. One may not, however, pick up the clothing until after the 9 days.

**Freshly laundered clothing:** It is forbidden to wear new or freshly laundered clothing during the 9 Days, except for undergarments and socks. All garments to be worn during the 9 Days should be worn for a short time before the 9 Days begin. If clothing becomes soiled and you don't have a clean change, you may wash only that which you need. Small children's clothing that are constantly getting dirty may be washed during the 9 Days. Bed linens should not be washed or changed, except when truly needed. Purchasing new clothing, even if they will first be worn after the 9 Days, is forbidden. Sewing and all types of alterations are not allowed during the 9 Days. If needed, minor tears and buttons may be mended.

**Eating Meat and Chicken and drinking wine:** Eating meat or chicken is prohibited during the 9 Days. Drinking wine or grape juice is also prohibited. These prohibitions do not extend to Shabbos or a Seudat Mitzvah such as a Brit, Pidyon Haben or a Siyum. The custom is to have a young child drink the wine from Havdalah; however, if there is no young child, the one making Havdalah may drink.

**Bathing and washing:** Among the more difficult restrictions to keep during the 9 Days is the prohibition against washing and bathing. Being that we are imitating the period of "shiva", the expected mental attitude is one that "doesn't care" due to the enormity of the loss suffered. It is obvious that the rabbis wanted us to act as if we are affected by the absence of the Beit Hamikdash in a manner that reflects a deep sense of loss in our relationship with G-d.

Our culture, much more so than other cultures, places a priority on personal hygiene. This is taken into account by the Halacha. The criteria established by the Halacha is: bathing for pleasure vs. bathing for necessity. The degree of "necessity" changes from person to person, so the Halacha expects some modification in our personal hygiene depending on the individual. Saunas, steam rooms, swimming, and other forms of pleasurable bathing activities are certainly prohibited during the 9 Days for every one. Small children are permitted to swim, bathe, etc.; however, we are especially vigilant during this period of time in supervising any activity which might contain risk. Each of us must seriously assess our level of "necessity"; however, everyone can take a quick, lukewarm shower, rather than a leisurely hot one and still accommodate our "need to be clean". Women preparing for the Mikvah are permitted to wash in the usual manner.

Good Shabbos.

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