

PEACE PURSUED

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion Pinchas: Tape # 154, Writing a Halachicly Sanctioned Will. Good Shabbos!

Grandson of Aharon -- The Lover of Peace & Pursuer of Peace

Parshas Pinchas is somewhat of a sequel to the events that happened in the previous parsha [Balak]. As we all know, in parshas Balak, we learned of one of the more sordid incidents in the history of the Jewish people. A leader of one of the tribes of Israel publicly and brazenly had relations with a non-Jewish woman in front of the entire community. People were so stunned by this event that they literally did not know what to do.

The pasuk [verse] tells us that Pinchas saw this and he remembered (according to the Talmud in Sanhedrin [82a]) the law which Moshe had previously taught -- that in the situation of an individual having relations with a non-Jewish woman in public, a person has the right to take the law into his own hands. Pinchas, acting on this law, killed both the man and the woman. The plague (which had broken out amongst the people) then ceased.

The narration in Parshas Pinchas continues at this point: "Pinchas the son of Elazar the son of Aharon the Priest, returned my anger ... therefore I am granting him My Covenant of Peace" [Bamidbar 25:11]. Rash"i here cites a very famous Medrash explaining why the Torah goes to such great lengths to tell us the genealogy of Pinchas: Some members of the community were skeptical about the use of such brazen tactics, killing someone publicly. They cynically traced the behavior to that of his maternal grandfather, Yisro, who had, in his earlier years "fattened calves for idol worship". People began to murmur, "How does this grandson of a Priest of Idolatry have the audacity to kill a Prince of one of the tribes of Israel?" Therefore, the pasuk came and traced his genealogy to Aharon -- his paternal grandfather.

Tracing Pinchas' genealogy to Aharon should not satisfy anyone. Everyone realizes that Pinchas had two grandfathers. What does it help that he was the grandson of Aharon? No one disputed that. This would not seem to mollify anyone's complaint -- that in this instance he undertook an action which

reflected on his descent from a Priest of Avodah Zarah.

The Sha'arei Orah, by Rav Meir Bergman, explains the answer: Everyone knew Pinchas had two grandfathers and everyone knew about genes and genetics. But, the people analyzed what had happened and they argued as follows:

We know one of his grandfathers was Aharon. However, we know that Aharon was the most peace-loving man that one could ever meet. He was the quintessential lover and pursuer of peace. However, Pinchas had another grandfather as well. The other grandfather was an idolater who was into paganism and all that that suggests. If we are to ask, they reasoned, from who did Pinchas get this quality to get up in front of everyone and kill somebody? One thing seems certain, that he did not get this quality from Aharon, the man of peace. Which grandfather, which genes, were coming into play here? It must be the act of the grandson of a Priest of Avodah Zarah.

Therefore, the pasuk comes and says "No, that is not true!" The genes that were responsible for this action, at this time, were the genes of Pinchas the son of Elazar the son of Aharon the Priest. This is what Aharon himself would have done.

One might ask, "But would the 'Man of Peace' take a spear and spear two people publicly"? The Chasam Sofer explains that this act might not be associated with the "Lover of Peace" (Ohev Shalom), but it is associated with the "Pursuer of Peace" (Rodef Shalom).

The terminology of 'Rodef' in the expression Rodef Shalom should give us pause. It seems to have connotations that do not fit in with the context of peace. The Chasam Sofer says that, sometimes, in order to make peace, a person must be Rodef Shalom -- chase away the peace. He must, in fact, create machlokes. Sometimes the ultimate peace is only achieved through a temporary act of pursuing (i.e. -- chasing away) peace.

There are some incidents and situations in life that demand that we stand up and say "No". Sometimes you need to protest "This is not Emes [True], and I have to give up Shalom [Peace] for Emes [Truth]." Aharon is the Lover of Peace, but sometimes he also had to be the Pursuer of Peace. Here it was the Pursuer of Peace who was acting, because, ultimately, that was the way to make Peace between the Jewish People and their Father in Heaven.

The Brisker Rav, zt"l, said in the name of his father, that one would have expected that G-d's reward to Pinchas would have been "My Covenant of Zealotry". L'Havdil, if we were going to vote for who was to get the Nobel Peace Prize that year, would the candidate have been Pinchas?. That would have raised eyebrows.

One would have no problem giving Pinchas the reward for Zealotry or for Bravery, but the Nobel Peace Prize doesn't seem appropriate. The Torah therefore emphasizes, that as much as we would consider this not to be Peace, this is the real Peace. Sometimes the real Peace (of making Peace between G-d and Israel) needs to be made in ways that appear less than peaceful.

We often hear criticism of great Rabbis who take stands on an issue. People complain, "Why do they have to make machlokes? Why do they have to start up? Why can't they leave well enough alone? Is this peace? It's machlokes! It's divisiveness!"

That complaint goes all the way back to Pinchas. Just like there are people in the 1990s that question and say "Isn't Shalom more important?", in Pinchas' times there were the same people. They said then "This isn't Aharon's grandson; this is not peace; this is divisiveness; sometimes you just have to keep quiet and turn the other way!" G-d responds: "That is not the case". Sometimes the Lover of Peace has to Pursue the Peace -- chase away the tendency to let things ride and go along without protest.

Therefore, both Pinchas' act and these Rabbi's stands are not acts of division. Pinchas did not receive 'My Covenant of Zealotry'. It was not a act of Bravado. Pinchas, appropriately, received 'My Covenant of Peace'.

Of course, one has to know when to take a stand and how to take a stand. That is why we should not make such decisions. But throughout the generations, we have always had our Gedolei Olam [World Class leaders] who have known when to say "Now we need to be the Pursuers of Peace". These Gedolei Olam receive the Blessing of 'My Covenant of Peace'.

Glossary

Avodah Zarah -- Foreign Worship (i.e. -- idolatry) machlokes -- argument

L'Havdil -- to distinguish (between a holy and a more mundane topic)

Sources and Personalities

Chasam Sofer -- Rav Moshe Sofer (1762-1839); Pressburg, Hungary.

Brisker Rav -- Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik (1886-1959); Brisk, Jerusalem; son of Rav Chaim Soloveitchik (1853-1918).

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