

# SECOND GUESSING PINCHAS

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 246, Hilchos Brochos -- Ikar v'Tafel. Good Shabbos!*

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## Second Guessing Pinchas -- There Are Always Those Who Complain

The beginning of this week's parsha states: "Pinchas son of Elazar son of Aharon the Priest, turned back My Anger from the Children of Israel" [Bamidbar 25:11]. Rash"i quotes from our Rabbis, who explain why it was necessary to trace the genealogy of Pinchas back to Aharon: Because the Tribes were teasing him, "Look who took it upon himself to kill a Prince of a Tribe of Israel? He himself [Pinchas] is a grandson (on his mother's side) from not only an idolater, but from a high priest of idolatry [Yisro]." Therefore it is necessary for the Torah to trace his distinguished lineage, as if HaShem [G-d] is saying, "Don't complain against My Pinchas."

The Shemen HaTov provides a very important insight about people. A terrible incident had just occurred. HaShem had become very angry with Klal Yisroel [the Jewish people], and as a result, there was a plague and people were dying. Nobody knew what to do. Pinchas took the law into his own hands, killed Zimri and Kozbi, and the plague stopped!

At that moment in history, was Pinchas a hero or a villain? Clearly he was a hero; he stopped the plague. Who would complain about a person who stopped a plague? What then does it mean that "the Tribes were murmuring about him" and saying he was wrong and should not have done it?

The Shemen HaTov says that certainly people were happy with what Pinchas did. If a poll had been taken at the time -- was Pinchas wrong or was Pinchas right -- there would have been an overwhelming vote of support for Pinchas' action. However, people were saying that "Of course the action was correct and necessary, but Pinchas was not the appropriate person to take such action." Others were saying, "I could have done it better" or "I could have stopped the plague a different way."

The Shemen HaTov comments that "we practically cannot find a place where this complaint is not

heard." There is no shul in the world where this is not a problem. Such complaints about controversial actions are always heard against the Rabbi or against the Gabbai. There are always the naysayers; there are always guys who sit on the sides and say "yes, of course it had to be done, but..." Their statement is always followed by a comment, such as "not him," "not this way," "not that way." There is always a complaint.

The Sfas Emes discusses the continuation of the above-mentioned pasuk: "when he [Pinchas] acted Jealously on My behalf in their midst." There are times when kana'us [zealous religious Jealousy] is appropriate and necessary. It must be done with great caution and great wisdom, but there is a time and place for kana'us. Who implanted this attribute in the Jewish people? Pinchas. If Pinchas was our "teacher", who taught us this entire attribute of kana'us, then we might think it inappropriate for the "disciples" to have complaints against him.

This, too, is typical. How often does it happen that we turn to people from whom we learned and who put us on our feet and say to them, "No, we are better than you; we know how to do it better?" This is all part of the same syndrome, the phenomenon of the "Monday morning quarterback".

That is what happened here. It was the "I can do it better syndrome." That is why the verse traces the lineage of Pinchas to Aharon, to tell us that HaShem is not pleased with such criticism.

### **Making Peace -- Between HaShem and His Nation**

The pasuk states that HaShem rewarded Pinchas: "Behold I have given to him [Pinchas] My covenant of peace" [25:12]. This reward seems somewhat incongruous. We would expect the reward to be similar to the action. We would expect the "Peace Prize" to have been given to Aharon, who was the lover of Peace and the pursuer of Peace. Pinchas was the zealot. He caused controversy. Why does Pinchas deserve the Peace Prize? Let Pinchas receive the Zealotry Award! Yet the Medrash on this verse emphasizes that "It is only right and proper (b'din hu) that Pinchas receive this reward of peace." Why was this the proper reward for Pinchas?

It is said in the name of Reb Chaim (Soleveitchik) that people have a misconception about the meaning of "peace." They think that "peace" means that no matter what happens, there should be tranquility and not be any fights. However, that is not the meaning of Shalom [peace]. Shalom comes from the word shalem (perfection). Shalom really means perfection -- the ultimate right. The ultimate right is when there is perfection between HaShem and His nation.

When a husband and wife are acting properly there is Shalom between them and there is Shalom between them and HaShem. That represents perfection (shleimut). If there are no arguments among the Jewish people, but there is friction and tension and division between Klal Yisroel and HaShem -- that is not Shalom. Without unity and harmony between the Jews and the Master of the World, there is no Shalom. Therefore, things can be patched over and everyone can "make nice and feel good," but if there is a division and gap between the nation and their G-d, this is not Shalom.

At the end of last week's parsha (Balak), a tremendous gap developed between Israel and G-d. HaShem was not happy. There was no Shalom. If Pinchas would have approached Zimri and said "Zimri, you know you really shouldn't be doing that, maybe you should think it over..." nothing would have been accomplished. That would not have restored the nation's harmony with HaShem. In order to restore such harmony in this case, it was necessary to go ahead and kill someone!

This is very radical. This is teaching us that sometimes making 'machlokes' (divisiveness) is the biggest and best form of making peace. However, this is a very hard task. Such zealotry can only be used gingerly, with kid gloves, and by people who know what they are doing. Sometimes it is in fact necessary to make (the commonly understood) 'shalom' and to keep quiet.

However, the case of Pinchas is the classic case of HaShem affirming that what was happening was not right and what was needed was bold action -- as taken by Pinchas -- to stop it and thereby restore ultimate Peace -- between HaShem and His nation.

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion (#246). The corresponding halachic portion for this tape is: Hilchos Brachos: Ikar Ve Tofel Writing a Halachicly Sanctioned Will. The other halachic portions for Pinchas from this series are:

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