

PINCHAS: A MAN FOR ALL ERAS AND ALL PLACES

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Pinchas

Pinchas: A Man For All Eras And All Places

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #688, A Manicure on Shabbos? Good Shabbos!

At the end of last week's Parsha, the pasuk [verse] says, "And Pinchas ben Elazar saw..." [Bamidbar 25:7]. The Medrash Rabba on those words asks, "and did not everyone else see the same thing as well?" The Medrash answers that Pinchas' uniqueness was that when he saw what was happening, he remembered a halacha: A zealot may mortally attack one who publicly has relations with an Aramean woman. (Ha'boel Aramis Kanain pogin bo.)

The Medrash adds that Pinchas met resistance from the people, who did not want him to proceed with killing one of the princes of Israel, the leader of the Tribe of Shimon. Pinchas somehow overcame the resistance of the people. Then when he approached the two perpetrators, the guards to the tent asked him: "What are you doing here?" He responded with the ambiguous comment: "I too came to take care of my needs," which could mean that he too wanted to participate in the same sin with the Midianite princess. Hearing this, they allowed him to enter, for otherwise he would never have gained access. It was then that he took the spear and stabbed them both in a way that would prove to all Israel that the forbidden act of immorality had occurred.

The Medrash continues, saying that Pinchas was jealous for the Name of G-d and proceeds to enumerate 12 miracles that were done for him during this episode. (Among the miracles listed: The blade of his sword miraculously lengthened to be long enough to pierce both of their bodies at the same time; Pinchas was given exceptional strength to lift up both the bodies while the two were impaled on his spear; the handle of the spear was given miraculous strength not to break under the weight of the bodies.)

The sefer Zichron Meir asks why is it important for Chazal to emphasize the twelve miracles that

happened for Pinchas, who fulfilled this (hopefully rare mitvah) of a zealot executing those engaged in the immoral crime of "haBoel Aramis"? The Zichron Meir explains that the phenomenon that was demonstrated here with Pinchas is one that is neither rare nor inapplicable to our own lives or our own religious outlook.

Many times, a person is faced with a situation where he thinks about himself and says "I am just one individual. What can I accomplish? I cannot single handedly turn the tide and accomplish anything by my individual actions." The normal attitude in such a situation is "What is the use of me even trying? It is humanly impossible to do anything about it!"

The lesson of Pinchas is that a person has to do what he is able to do and many times he will then merit miraculous s'yata d'Shmaya [Help from Heaven] that will provide him with the needed wherewithal to do what needs to be done.

The Zichron Meir links this idea with the word "b'yado" [in his hand] in the pasuk "And he took a spear in his hand" [Bamidbar 25:7]. This is reminiscent of the Medrash Tanchuma's description of the erection of the Mishkan: Moshe Rabbeinu asked the Almighty - "How is it possible for one person to raise the entire structure?" G-d responded, according to the Medrash, "occupy yourself with your hand" (b'yadcha). In other words, "You do with your own hands what you are able to do, and I will do the rest." Chazal mention a similar idea in connection with the daughter of Pharaoh stretching out her hand to reach the basket with the baby Moshe floating in the Nile. Our Sages say that she was standing a great distance away and that basically the act of stretching out her hand to reach the basket would have been futile, were it not for the fact that her arm became miraculously elongated so that it could reach the basket.

The point of all these teachings is that a person must make the effort to do what it is within his power to do, even though rationally that which he can accomplish by his own actions will be minimal, if not totally futile. Once that effort is made, he may merit miraculous Divine intervention.

If Pinchas would have rationalized "who am I to take it upon myself to get involved here," history would have been different. (Remember, Pinchas at this stage of his career was not only an anonymous "John Doe" -- he was even less than that. Chazal say that people used to belittle him as the grandson of Yisro who was an idolater.) Pinchas overcame the resistance of the people who did not want him to proceed; he went against the spirit of the time; it looked like it was a futile effort; but he did what he had to do.

The point of the Medrash that 12 miracles were done for him is that this is exactly what happens in life. A person does what he needs to do, and the Almighty provides the rest. One person CAN make the difference. One person CAN turn the tide. One person who acts sincerely for the Sake of Heaven can merit great s'yata d'Shmaya [Help from Heaven]. This is the story of Pinchas. It is not just the story of one man that happened thousands of years ago and will never again happen. The story of Pinchas is a story that can happen in every community in any time and in any era. Pinchas is the story

of the power of one individual and what one sincere individual can accomplish.

Tzelafchad's Daughters Typify the Concept of "Righteous Women"

The Medrash comments that in the Generation of the Wilderness, the women fixed that which the men ruined. The first example cited is the fact that the women did not want to give their jewelry for creation of the Golden Calf; only the men were interested in donating this gold to make that idol. Similarly with the Spies - the men were the ones who believed the spies and did not want to go into the Land of Israel; the women did not fall for the slander. On the contrary, they made independent attempts to gain inheritance in the Land.

It is for this reason that the section of the daughters of Tzelafchad is recorded adjacent to the death of the generation of the Wilderness. This demonstrates that they had a different attitude than that of the generation who had just died out when it came to the Land of Israel.

The point of this Medrash is to underscore the concept of the Nashim Tzidkaniyous [righteous women]. Women have a more innate sense of faith (Emunah) than do men. Men may study in Kollel and become bigger Torah scholars, but it is the women who have the innate sense of what is right and wrong, and who stand up for what is right.

The women did not accept the negative attitude toward Eretz Yisrael. That was the pattern throughout the years of the Wilderness.

I recently read the following incident involving the Brisker Rav.

One year there was a movement in Brisk to introduce a certain "modern innovation" in the High Holiday service. On the High Holidays, they used to have a choir in the shul in Brisk. The tradition was that the members of the choir stood in immediate proximity to the Chazan, in a semi-circle around him. The proposed "modern innovation" was that the members of the choir stand on a balcony, off to the side. The Brisker Rav felt this was an inappropriate imitation of "foreign sources" (pirtza). The Brisker Rav came into the shul and saw the choir members in the balcony and ordered them down. They dutifully came down to the main shul. The Gabaim of the shul were upset at having their innovation nullified and they ordered the choir members back to the balcony. The choir members dutifully went back to the balcony.

Seeing what happened, the Brisker Rav went right back up to the balcony and ordered them down. The Gabaim then ordered them back up. This went back and forth several times, until finally the Brisker Rav turned to the women in the Ezras Nashim and pleaded with them "Holy Jewish women, please order your husbands downstairs where they belong." The women started yelling at their husbands to listen to the Rabbi and not the Gabaim and the men stayed downstairs next to the Chazan. They were more afraid of their wives than of the Brisker Rav.

We see, however, that when push came to shove -- to whom did the Brisker Rav turn to help enforce his ruling? He turned to the Nashim Tzidkaniyus, the righteous Jewish women who

intuitively have a better understanding than their male counterparts about the moral propriety and appropriateness of certain spiritual matters.

It is a well known fact that if there were not a Bais Yaakov movement there would never have been a Kollel movement in America. Someone needs to take the responsibility to help a husband sit and learn. This is a product of the Bais Yaakov movement, which is both a by-product of and a producer of Nashim Tzidkaniyus.

Never underestimate the power of the Nashim Tzidkaniyus.

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. The complete list of halachic portions for this parsha from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are:

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