

Parashat Pinchas, 5770, 2010:

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Waiting for Eliyahu

Dedicated to the sacred memory of my sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra, the *refuah shlaimah* of Sarah bat Rachel, Yosef Shmuel ben Miriam, and Sheva bat Sarah Rivka, and in commemoration the *yahrtzeit* of Chana bat Shmuel *aleaha hashalom*.

The end of last week's *parasha*, Parashat Balak, narrates the story of many of the men of our people pursuing the women of Moab and their god Baal Peor:

Israel settled in Shittim, and the people began to commit harlotry with the daughters of the Moabites. They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and prostrated themselves to their gods. Israel became attached to Baal Peor, and the anger of the L-rd flared against Israel. The L-rd said to Moses, "Take all the leaders of the people and hang them before the L-rd, facing the sun, and then the flaring anger of the L-rd will be removed from Israel." Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Each of you shall kill the men who became attached to Baal Peor." (*Sefer Bamidbar* 25:1-5, this and all Bible and Rashi translations, *The Judaic Press Complete Tanach*)

If this was not bad enough, Zimri ben Salu, the prince of the tribe of Shimon, now publicly took a Midianite woman before the eyes of the entire congregation:

Then an Israelite man came and brought the Midianite woman to his brethren, before the eyes of Moses and before the eyes of the entire congregation of the children of Israel, while they were weeping at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. (Ibid., 6)

Why was everyone "weeping at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting?" Rashi (1040-1105), basing himself upon *Midrash Tanchuma* 20 gives the following explanation:

while they were weeping: The law [that anyone publicly cohabiting with a non-Jewish woman is to be executed by zealots] eluded him [Moshe]. [Therefore,] they all burst out weeping. At the incident of the golden calf Moses [successfully] confronted six hundred thousand as it says, "He ground it until it was powder..." (*Sefer Shemot* 32:20), yet here he appeared so helpless? However, [this happened] so that Pinchas should come and take what was due to him. (Underlining my own)

Rashi and the Midrash allude to Pinchas' actions that conclude last week's *parasha*.

What, however, did he do? When Pinchas witnessed this gross public immorality taking

place, he remembered the law and took a spear in his hand a to execute Zimri and his consort:

Pinchas the son of Eleazar the son of Aaron the kohen saw this, arose from the congregation, and took a spear in his hand. He went after the Israelite man into the chamber and drove [it through] both of them; the Israelite man, and the woman through her stomach, and the plague ceased from the children of Israel. (*Sefer Bamidbar* 25:7-8)

Pinchas' zealous and halachically-mandated actions were rewarded with Hashem's highest approbation. He received the *brit shalom* (Covenant of Peace), i.e. the *brit kehunat olam* (Eternal Covenant of the Kehunah):

Pinchas the son of Eleazar the son of Aaron the kohen has turned My anger away from the children of Israel by his zealously avenging Me among them, so that I did not destroy the children of Israel because of My zeal. Therefore, say, "I hereby give him My covenant of peace. It shall be for him and for his descendants after him [as] an eternal covenant of kehunah, because he was zealous for his G-d and atoned for the children of Israel." (Ibid., 11-13)

As Rashi opines above, "At the incident of the golden calf Moses [successfully] confronted six hundred thousand as it says, "He ground it until it was powder..." (*Sefer Shemot* 32:20). Clearly, then, Moshe, no less than Pinchas, zealously avenged G-d's glory. Yet, Pinchas alone received the *brit kehunat olam*. This is an exegetical challenge that has captivated commentators throughout the ages. In my opinion, Rabbi Baruch Halevi Epstein (1860-1941), in his illuminating collection of Torah analyses entitled, *Torah Temimah*, suggested one of the most cogent solutions to this problem. Allow me to paraphrase his view:

It is true that Moshe removed Hashem's anger from the Jewish people on a number of occasions, including the episodes of the Golden Calf and the Spies. Yet, the reconciliation between G-d and the Jewish people that Moshe achieved was an incomplete one, as we clearly see by the subsequent events that unfolded following these incidents. In stark contrast, Pinchas was able to bring about a complete reconciliation that totally removed any anger from Hashem toward our people. Therefore, Pinchas, and Pinchas alone, was rewarded with Hashem's Covenant of Peace. (*Sefer Bamidbar*, Chapter 25, comment 24)

Rav Epstein helps us focus upon the ultimate purpose of Pinchas' actions. Clearly, one

goal, and one goal only, motivated his zeal - the complete reconciliation of G-d and His people. Therefore, upon achieving this goal, Pinchas – and not Moshe - was deserving of the Covenant of Peace.

Pinchas' singular pursuit of peace motivated *Chazal* (our Sages of blessed memory) to identify Eliyahu the Prophet (9th century BCE) as his spiritual reincarnation:

Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said: "Pinchas is Eliyahu." The Holy One Blessed be He said to Pinchas: "You have placed peace between Me and the Jewish people in this world; so, too, shall you do so in the future." As the text states: "Lo, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of the L-rd, that he may turn the heart of the fathers back through the children, and the heart of the children back through their fathers...[*Sefer Malachi* 3:23-24]" (*Midrash Yalkut Shimoni*, Pinchas I, translation my own)

Chazal further underscored the role of Eliyahu as the herald of *shalom b'olam* (peace in the world) in a parallel text to our midrash, found in the last mishnah in *Mishnah Eduyot*:

And the Sages said: [Eliyahu primarily will come to the world] not to render judgment against an impure family lineage and distance them from us, or to reveal a pure family lineage and bring them closer to us. Instead, he will come to bring about peace in our world. As the text states: "Lo, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of the L-rd, that he may turn the heart of the fathers back through the children, and the heart of the children back through their fathers...[*Sefer Malachi* 3:23-24]" (Translation my own)

Beyond a doubt, Eliyahu's ultimate purpose is to usher in the era of true peace and harmony in the world. Yeshayahu (Isaiah), the great 8th-century BCE prophet and sage, offered one of the most famous and stirring descriptions of this longed-for time:

And it shall be at the end of the days, that the mountain of the L-rd's house shall be firmly established at the top of the mountains, and it shall be raised above the hills, and all the nations shall stream to it. And many peoples shall go, and they shall say, "Come, let us go up to the L-rd's mount, to the house of the G-d of Jacob, and let Him teach us of His ways, and we will go in His paths," for out of Zion shall the Torah come forth, and the word of the L-rd from Jerusalem. And he shall judge between the nations and reprove many peoples, and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift the sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. (*Sefer Yeshayahu* 2:2-4)

Unfortunately, recent events in the Middle East demonstrate to us just how far away we are from the realization of Yeshayahu's prophetic vision and the fulfillment of Pinchas/Eliyahu's purpose. Once again, the Gaza flotilla incident reminds us just how hated and reviled the Jewish people are in the eyes of the world. Mr. Shelby Steele, a senior fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution, perhaps said it best in his incisive article that appeared on the Op-Ed page of the June 21, 2010 edition of *The Wall Street Journal*. The article is entitled: "*Israel and the Surrender of the West.*" He begins by noting how world opinion is firmly aligned against our people:

The most interesting voice in all the fallout surrounding the Gaza flotilla incident is that sanctimonious and meddling voice known as "world opinion." At every turn "world opinion," like a school marm, takes offense and condemns Israel for yet another infraction of the world's moral sensibility. And this voice has achieved an international political legitimacy so that even the silliest condemnation of Israel is an opportunity for self-congratulation.

Next, he cites some of the practical manifestations of this voice of "world-opinion:"

Rock bands now find moral imprimatur in canceling their summer tour stops in Israel (Elvis Costello, the Pixies, the Gorillaz, the Klaxons). A demonstrator at an anti-Israel rally in New York carries a sign depicting the skull and crossbones drawn over the word "Israel." White House correspondent Helen Thomas, in one of the ugliest incarnations of this voice, calls on Jews to move back to Poland. And of course the United Nations and other international organizations smugly pass one condemnatory resolution after another against Israel while the Obama administration either joins in or demurs with a wink.

With consummate skill and insight, Steele notes how something new and frightening is afoot here that the modern State of Israel has never experienced before in her brief 62-year history:

This is something new in the world, this almost complete segregation of Israel in the community of nations. And if Helen Thomas's remarks were pathetic and ugly, didn't they also point to the end game of this isolation effort: the nullification of Israel's legitimacy as a nation? There is a chilling familiarity in all this. One of the world's oldest stories is playing out before our eyes: **The Jews are being scapegoated again.** (Emphasis my own)

Allow me to explicate Mr. Steele's remarks:

1. Israel is nearly completely segregated in the community of nations.
2. The goal, as presaged in Helen Thomas's "pathetic and ugly" words is nothing less than the nullification of Israel as a nation and its complete delegitimization.
3. As has happened in all times and places, we are being scapegoated by our enemies once again.

We know all too well what happened when our people were scapegoated in Germany, the most intellectually sophisticated and culturally advanced country of its time. More than six million Jews were brutally murdered at the hands of this "enlightened" nation, as they demonized, segregated, and denied us our right to live. The dehumanization, and consequent delegitimization, of our people at the hands of the Germans of World War II, remains ever sharp in our collective consciousness as a nation – even as the community of nations seems to have forgotten the horrendous consequences.

We now await the arrival of Pinchas/Eliyahu who, along with *Mashiach Tzidkeinu* (the Righteous Messiah), will engender the universal recognition of our legitimacy as a people and the right of Israel, our beloved nation, to exist. May the *Mashiach* come soon and in our days, to rebuild the *Beit Hamikdash* (Holy Temple) and bring everlasting peace to all mankind. *V'chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

Past drashot may be found at my website:
http://home.mindspring.com/~rdbe/parashat_hashavuah/index.html.

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The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added please do not hesitate to contact me via email: rdbe718@gmail.com.