

Parashat Pinchas 5778, 2018:

*Pinchas and the Brit Shalom*

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yecheiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, Shayna Yehudit bat Avraham Manes and Rivka, and HaRav Raphael ben HaRav Ephraim, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, Yekutiel Yehudah ben Pessel Lifsha, Yakir Ephraim ben Rachel Devorah, Eliezer ben Sarah, Shoshana Elka bat Etel Dina and Tzvi Yoel ben Yocheved and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

We are a very fortunate people. If one were to ask “Who is the greatest spiritual hero in Jewish history?” many names would surely come to mind. Some of us would suggest one of the *Avot* or *Emahot* (Patriarchs or Matriarchs). Others might answer *Dovid HaMelech* (King David), or one of the Prophets. Most people, however, would probably choose *Moshe Rabbeinu*.

Moshe’s amazing and multifold accomplishments are legendary. His leadership was extraordinary. His intellect was nearly unparalleled. The level of *nevuah* (prophecy) he achieved was different in kind and degree than that of any other prophet who ever lived. His ability to commune with Hashem is unequalled in the history of our people. Therefore, the Torah teaches us: “There never arose another prophet amongst the Jewish people like Moshe, to whom Hashem revealed Himself face to face.” (*Sefer Devarim* 34:10, my translation, as per Onkelos).

Rabbi Baruch ha-Levi Epstein *zatzal* (1860-1942), popularly known as the *Torah Temimah* after the title of his incisive Torah commentary, explains to us that there was one area, however, wherein Moshe was not able to achieve the highest heights. Instead, as clearly stated in our *parasha*, Pinchas ha-Kohen was able to accomplish a goal that eluded even *Moshe Rabbeinu*:

“Therefore, let it be said: ‘Behold, I [Hashem] give to him [Pinchas] my Covenant of Peace’ (*Bamidbar* 25:12). ‘It is fitting that this atonement [as seen in the words ‘Covenant of Peace’] will continue to bring about expiation forever more’ (*Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin*, 82b). At first glance, it

is very difficult to understand why Pinchas merited this explicit reward even more than Moshe Rabbeinu, since we find numerous times wherein [through Moshe's efforts] Hashem "forgot" His anger against the Jewish people, such as in the instances of the Golden Calf and the Spies. (All translations, underlining, brackets and emphasis my own)

After raising this fundamental issue, Rav Epstein continues his analysis as to why Pinchas, and not Moshe, was deserving of the Covenant of Peace:

But the matter should, however, be explained in the following manner: We see from this that there was a fundamental difference that obtained between Moshe's and Pinchas' ability to remove Hashem's anger [from upon the Jewish people]. Moshe was able to remove Hashem's anger solely for *a limited time*, yet there remained, so to speak, in Hashem's heart (mind) a grievance against the Jewish people, just as we find in the instances of the Golden Calf...and the Spies. Peace such as this cannot be called true and absolute peace. The removal of Hashem's anger in regards to Pinchas, however, was a complete and total removal of anger [that continues to last]. Therefore, Pinchas merited the just reward [of this Covenant of Peace].

In sum, Pinchas was able to effectuate a total and permanent peace between Hashem and His people that was devoid of any future recriminations and punishments. This is something that escaped even *Moshe Rabbeinu's* grasp. The question that still remains, however, is "Why did this difference obtain between them?"

I believe the Torah provides us with an answer this question in the phrase, "When he [Pinchas] displayed the anger that I [Hashem] should have displayed," (*Bamidbar* 25:11, translation per Rashi's second gloss on *Bamidbar* 25:11). In a word, Pinchas acted as Hashem's messenger in expressing His legitimate anger. He channeled Hashem's fury in response to the vulgar immorality and idol worship in which many of the men were engaged with the women of Moab. In this sense, Pinchas was a zealot who was totally devoted to Hashem. His complete being merged with Hashem's righteous anger in his desire to execute the Almighty's will.

In stark contrast to Pinchas, *Moshe Rabbeinu* never became angry – either on a personal level, or in the service of Hashem. Although the Torah states in Parashat Korach regarding the temerity of

Datan and Aviram, “And Moshe became very *upset*” (*Bamidbar* 16:15, per Rashi’s explanation), he never became angry – even in the positive sense of Pinchas’ anger.

This, perhaps, is as it should be. Anger, in nearly all instances, is considered by *Chazal* (our Sages) to be tantamount to *avodah zarah* (idol worship), since in the heat of anger a person cannot focus upon Hashem, Torah, or *mitzvot*. Instead, such an individual is entirely consumed by the emotion of anger, and becomes irrational. Clearly, then, one of the worst characteristics an authentic leader of *klal Yisrael* (the Jewish people) can have is the trait of anger. Little wonder, then, that Moshe neither had the personality trait of anger, nor did he become angry – even when it was warranted in the service of Hashem.

Paradoxically, Pinchas received the *Brit Shalom* (Covenant of Peace) after having brought about total peace between Hashem and *klal Yisrael* precisely because of the righteous anger he expressed on behalf of the Almighty. In this way, served as a protective force and bridged the gaping chasm between the Jewish people and the Creator, and guarded His holy Torah and *mitzvot*. As spiritually heroic as Pinchas’ actions were, however, it must be stressed that they were permissible solely at that time and may never be repeated.

With Hashem’s help, may we strive to emulate Pinchas’ love and devotion to the Holy One blessed be He, and may we ever dedicate ourselves to His Torah and *mitzvot*. *V’chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org/> using the search criteria of Etengoff and the parasha’s name.

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 <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

\*\*\* My audio *shiurim* for Women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at:  
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\*\*\* I have posted 164 of [Rabbi Soloveitchik's](#) English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.