

Parashat Pinchas 5783, 2023:

The Brit Shalom

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon HaKohane, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yeziel, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Gittel Malka bat Moshe, Alexander Leib ben Benyamin Yosef, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Moshe's multifold accomplishments are legendary. His leadership was extraordinary, the level of *nevuah* he achieved was different in kind and degree than that of any other prophet who ever lived, and his ability to commune with Hashem is unequaled in the history of our people: "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).

In his Torah commentary, *Torah Temimah*, Rabbi Baruch ha-Levi Epstein *zatzal* (1860-1942) informs us that there was one area, however, wherein Pinchas superseded even *Moshe Rabbeinu*:

"Therefore, let it be said: 'Behold, I [Hashem] give to him [Pinchas] my Covenant of Peace (*brit shalom*).'" (*Bamidbar* 25:12) "It is fitting that this atonement [as seen in the words '*brit shalom*'] 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 where, [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 suggests why Pinchas, and not Moshe, was deserving of the *brit shalom*:

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 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. In contrast, the removal of Hashem's anger in Pinchas' case was a complete and total removal of anger [forevermore]. Therefore, Pinchas merited the just reward [of the brit shalom].

In sum, Pinchas was able to obtain a total and permanent peace between Hashem and His people—devoid of any future recriminations and punishments. This is something that escaped even *Moshe Rabbeinu's* grasp. Nonetheless, a crucial question remains: “Why was there such a manifest difference between them?”

I believe the following phrase guides us toward an answer: “When he [Pinchas] displayed the anger that I [Hashem] should have displayed.” (*Bamidbar* 25:11, per Rashi, second gloss on *Bamidbar* 25:11) In sum, 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 had been engaged. In this sense, Pinchas was a zealot who was completely devoted to Hashem. As such, his total being merged with Hashem's righteous anger in his desire to execute Hashem's will.

In stark contrast, *Moshe Rabbeinu* never became angry—neither on a personal level, nor in the service of Hashem, and this is as it should be. *Chazal* view anger as tantamount to *avodah zarah*, since in the heat of anger, a person cannot focus upon Hashem, Torah, or *mitzvot*. Instead, he or she is entirely consumed by the emotion of anger and becomes irrational. Clearly, one of the worst characteristics an authentic leader of *klal Yisrael* could have is anger. Little wonder, then, that *Moshe* neither had the personality trait of anger, nor did he become angry—even when it was warranted.

Paradoxically, Pinchas was gifted the *brit shalom* after having brought about total peace between Hashem and *klal Yisrael*—as a result of the righteous anger he expressed on behalf of the Almighty. In this way, Pinchas served as a protective force and bridged the gaping chasm between Hashem and our people. As spiritually heroic as Pinchas' actions were, however, it must be stressed that they were permissible solely at that moment in history. Zealotry is simply not, and must never become, an operable concept in the Jewish lexicon of behavior.

With Hashem's help, may we strive to emulate Pinchas' dedication and devotion to the Holy One blessed be He. *V'chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

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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: [The Rav](#)