

Parshas Pinchas

This week's parsha- Pinchas opens with the peace award given by Hashem to Pinchas for his courageous and zealous act of killing Zimri. He was awarded a "Bris Shalom"- the covenant of peace and the priesthood. This award was given to him showing that his act of zealotry was supported by Hashem- even though (based on Rashi) he was being reprimanded and made fun of by the Jews. They were convinced that his actions were incorrect.

When thinking about this act- the Torah is very exact to ensure Pinchas- his lineage and reward are highlighted. We have a few incidences of zealotry that took place in the Chumash- such as Moshe Rabbeinu killing the Egyptian guard for which he had to run away to Midian. As well Shechem and his people were killed by Shimon and Levi over the defilement of Dinah their sister. In those incidences, there is a subtext that mepharshim highlight which brings out the reason for the details of the narrative- as described in the Torah.

In Pinchas' case- he was counteracting the efforts made by Bilam to get the Jews to sin. Bilam- along with other non-Jewish prophets used their power of Hashem- to construe morals into their own definition. When Bilam realized he would not be able to curse the Jews, he did the next best thing perhaps- which was to make some aware of the immoral behavior that he would have justified to them, so much so, that the Jews were convinced Pinchas' act was wrong.

Yet Hashem tells us he was awarded the covenant of peace. I think the moral lesson is, that zealous acts must be guided by the covenant of peace- that is Shalom- which shares the same root as Shleimus- completion. Meaning the outcome cannot create an "us and them" situation- which is ever so evident in most manifestations of zealous behavior. Zealous behavior is the realization of mesiras nefesh that is self-sacrifice- not necessarily resulting in actual death, but as I've written at other times (especially around Parshas Noach) mesiras nefesh is the pushing oneself over their limit to do a mitzva (that chassidus expounds upon how to appropriately perform this).

Pinchas was guided by the truth in the Torah, and he showed the way- albeit in an extreme act of zealotry- to keep people on the path of truth. If the Torah is truly the guide the truth will shine. Divisiveness as a result of one's zealotry is likely not an optimal outcome. We can learn how to be zealous from the actions of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. He never created an "us and them" type of mutual exclusivity that other leaders create when creating a mote around a particular way of life. Rather the Rebbe taught positivity, and that if you are steadfast to truth (the Torah and its ways) people will be attracted to it. You won't have to capitulate or bend the Torah to fit the ways of the world, quite contrarily- the world will bend itself to the ways of the Torah.

Although for parshas Pinchas we would read the Haftora from Melachim 1, since we are in the 3 weeks¹, we read the Haftora for

¹ There are a couple of reasons this is read. 1) one of the first visions of Yirmiyahu was of the almond tree which takes three weeks to bear fruit from when a

bud is formed. Much like we mourn the three weeks between 17 Tammuz and 9 Av- where Yerushalayim was sieged and the destruction of the temples

Matos which begins with Yirmiyahu 1:1. We are taught of who Yirmiayhu was- a young prophet- who lived at the time of the destruction of the first Beis Hamikdash. People falsely believed that the Beis Hamikdash would save them when they were astray with idol worship in their private lives. Furthermore, he was tested by many who claimed he was a false prophet. This parallels Pinchas- who countered the nations view to do what was right even though they called him son of Puti- referencing the evil ways of his grandfather- Yisro- before Yisro became close to the Jewish People. Furthermore, Yirmiyahu's lineage stems from Rachav- as Rashi explains whose origin story was described as coming from a bad past yet she returned to Hashem- much like the story of the Jews who may have had a bad past but can return to Hashem.

Based on understanding the Haftora it is evident that human psychology hasn't changed, and contagion and group think could alter the trajectory of truth- because that's what the masses are believing, when the truth is the opposite. To counter this we must act zealously in the ways of truth and try not to create "us and them" rather to be a beacon of light. And in this way, we would merit the coming of Mashiach.

Good Shabbos

occurred, along with a plethora of other historically terrible things to the Jews. 2) the Hebrew word for Almond is Shaked- which can also mean haste-which

was that the punishments of destruction would hastily befall the Jews.