

Parshas Pinchas

This week's Parsha is Pinchas, which begins where the last Parsha left off; that is where Pinchas, in a zealous act, brought the end of the plague that befell the Jews by killing the perpetrators of the act.

Rashi explains that Pinchas' legacy is delineated to combat the naysayers who were antagonizing Pinchas over his killing of a prince due to the prince's lewd acts. Rashi explains that Hashem was presiding over the act and stated that it was intact, and Pinchas would be rewarded to be part of the Kohanim¹.

The pesukim finishes with Pinchas bringing peace, and the word Shalom Halachically has a broken Vav. Traditionally, this would Posul the Torah, but it is explicitly broken here. Rashi and others don't specifically comment here as to the reason. However, the Rashi on the words seems to indicate that Pinchas was given peace, and according to the Gemara and other Mefharshim, resulted in him having a very long (and complete, i.e. another definition of the word Shalom) meaning this 'Shalom' was Pinchas specific, and not necessarily a blessing to the rest of the Jews.

Others explain, such as from Kiddushin 66b, that this is teaching a Halacha that a priest must not be missing a limb; Rav Nachman said that since the Vav is

severed, the word should be read Shalem (complete, i.e. not missing a limb) as opposed to Shalom, literally, peace.

According to Midrash, 24,000 people fell in the plague that Pinchas stopped. We know of 24,000 people who died in a plague much later in history were the students of Rabbi Akiva. A common thread here is that zealotry only sometimes brings complete peace. Case in point, here there were Jews who disagreed with Pinchas, and although it was apparent based on Hashem's response that Pinchas was right, zealotry is a tool that needs much care to not result in division. That is an incomplete peace.

Hashem said that Pinchas' zealotry was justified because it was in the name of Hashem, but many may convince themselves their "zealous" act is for Hashem. Still, it is not and can be catastrophic or bring a temporary veil of peace. One must be complete to uphold peace, and keeping peace takes a lot of work. Zealous and extreme acts are temporary solutions, not necessarily sustainable. This is further evidenced by the fact that even Rabbi Akiva's students, who ideally kept Rabbi Akiva's famous adage of loving your fellow Jew, were punished for a lack of selfless love. The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that because the students were Kanoim, i.e. zealots, they disregarded their neighbours and the true selfless love one must exude,

priesthood. This means Hashem designating who to be Kohanim is not to be argued. It is referenced here again because the beginning of the Parsha is explicit on Pinchas' lineage and his becoming part of the priests, so there should be no dispute.

¹ One can posit that the explicit reference to Korach's sins in 26:9,10 and Rashi's explanation are due to Pinchas' allocation of the priesthood by Hashem, "they become a sign" that is a reminder that no unauthorized person would dispute the

unfortunately resulting in catastrophe (24,000 untimely deaths).

How, then, must one act?

The answer can be found based on the remaining content of the Parsha, which primarily focuses on the holiday sacrifices, resulting in content from Parshas Pinchas being the most read throughout the year. In 28:1,2, which begins the sacrifices, Hashem says, “Tzaves B’nei Yisrael.” Rashi there says, “Before you command me about my sons, command my sons about me...” That is, act in the way of Hashem based on what Hashem tells us to do (and Rashi provides a parable). Which is to follow the Torah, learn and live in its ways, and remind yourself to do this. Much like we know, the holidays are beacons of light for which we connect, constantly and every month, to Hashem (even on fast days, except for Cheshvan), and there is always time to connect to Hashem. There is always a reminder in the mundane to reconnect and bring sacrifices from ourselves, i.e., in today’s time, extra commitments to serve Hashem and be engrossed in the Torah. In that way, we can bring out true peace that is not broken, incomplete, or temporary.

Pinchas, for his pure act in the name of Hashem, was blessed with priesthood; we are blessed with the holidays and the sacrifices that are there for the taking, there for us to use, and to connect and constantly reconnect with Hashem. The parsha concludes with the Shalmeichem, i.e. peace offerings, meaning we will achieve peace and Shleimus.