

Parshas Pinchas

This week's parsha is Pinchas, named for the zealot who killed Zimri in an act of vengeance against the deplorable behaviour. Rashi on the first pesukim of the Parsha explains the honour bestowed on Pinchas (such as the Kahuna, even though he was from Ahron's descendants and was born before the Kahuna was bestowed on the family), especially since, at first, Pinchas' actions were shunned by the community. In other words, his reaction was not accepted by the public. Why, then, does the Torah put this story here? Is it about zealotry? What if you are wrong about where you are zealous and react callously, acting too harshly? I think the answer comes from all the years of Midrashic interpretations about how to be a Jew.

At the end of the first Perek of Tanya, the Alter Rebbe ends with a critical point that he has historically been criticized for. Now, a point to note: if it's the end of the first chapter of his seminal work, the Alter Rebbe obviously chose to say this line for a reason. The line is "שְׂכָל צְדִיקָה וְחֶסֶד שְׂאוֹמוֹת הָעוֹלָם עוֹשִׂין, אֵינָן אֶלָּא לְהַתִּיּוֹר כו'" That is "all the charity and kindness of the nations of the world are for their own self-glorification..." What does this line mean? One must learn the rest of Tanya to fully comprehend its depth, but the point is that, as humans who live in this world, we Jews are acclimated to our environments, and we forget at times that

Hashem runs the world and that every act we do is in the service of making things holy, and not, heaven forbid, the opposite. But to fully understand how to do this, to fully wear the lens of Torah and Mitzvos, and see the world as G-d's world. What the Alter Rebbe then is saying with that line is that the difference between a Jew and anyone else is that we have the opportunity to do things only for Hashem and because Hashem demands this of us. Everything else (i.e. without Hashem) is self-glorification.

A person like Pinchas, who acted with zeal, we can presume, saw the issues arise and was one to act on them. Meaning the Torah names the Parsha, and gives him a highlighted spot, and Rashi delivers an explanation, because an act of Zealousness according to the Torah, and seeing it as backed by the Torah, is an accepted act. One of pure intention and purely for Hashem, devoid of ulterior motives. These acts of zealousness will be rewarded, and not the opposite.

This being said, the rest of the Parsha includes the counting of the Jews, the recounting of the daughters of Tzelafchad (which teaches compassion), and the lists of the Korbanos (and subsequently the readings for Rosh Chodesh and holidays). The Holidays serve as a reminder and a magnet, drawing us back to the calendar and to time to recognize Hashem, even when we are abounding in our mundane and physical lives.

Connecting to the story of Pinchas, who acted righteously and zealously, his Parsha contains the magnets (i.e. the readings) that remind us of why we are here and what we are doing, because this is Hashem's world, and we are doing our part to make it an appropriate dwelling place for Hashem.

Good Shabbos!