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A VORT FROM THE ROSH YESHIVA מורינו הרה"ג ר' אברהם גורביץ שליט"א

פרשת פינחס

פינחס בן אלעזר בן אהרן הכהן השיב את חמתו מעל בני ישראל בקנאו את קנאתי בתוכם ולא כליתי את בני ישראל בקנאתי. לכן אמר הנני נתן לו את בריתי שלום. והיתה לו ולזרעו אחריו ברית כהנת עולם תחת אשר קנא לאלקיו ויכפר על בני ישראל. (במדבר כה, י-יג)

Pinchos son of Elazar son of Ahron the Kohen, turned back My wrath from upon the Bnei Yisroel when he zealously avenged My vengeance among them, so I did not consume the Bnei Yisroel in My vengeance. Therefore, say: Behold! I give him My covenant of peace. And it shall be for him and his offspring after him a covenant of eternal priesthood, because he took vengeance for his God, and he atoned for the Bnei Yisroel. (Bamidbar 25:10-13)

After failing miserably in his attempt to curse Klal Yisroel, Bilom seeks to drive them to spiritual self-destruction. He advises Balak that Hashem does not tolerate immorality, and thus entices them to act promiscuously. A Midianite woman succeeds in ensnaring Zimri, Nasi of Shimon, into publicly sinning, which demands an immediate response. Pinchos, with a spear in hand, kills the two. In reward for his actions, Hashem blesses Pinchos with a covenant of peace and eternal *kehunah*.

Rashi explains that the people accused Pinchos of murder and humiliated him by saying, "Did you see the grandson of one (Yisro) who fattened animals for sacrifices to idols, yet dared to kill a Nasi of Klal Yisroel." Therefore, the Torah traced his roots back to Ahron HaKohen.

The Meforshim question that those who disgraced Pinchos certainly knew that he was Ahron's grandson; yet, that fact did not stop them from casting aspersion on his motives. Of what value then is the Torah's highlighting his connection to Ahron?

R' Leib *zatzal*, in Meorei Sheorim, addresses this issue using a Gemara (*Yoma* 23a) that talks about the process of selecting Kohanim to perform the *avodah* in the Beis HaMikdash. The Gemara tells the story of two Kohanim who raced up the ramp of the Mizbeach to be the first to grab the right to do *terumas hadeshen*. When one of them beat the other, the second one stabbed the first to death. The father of the slain victim arrived and found that he was writhing on the floor, but still alive. Despite this, he instructed the other Kohanim, "Behold, my son is still alive and therefore remove the knife to prevent it from becoming *tamei*." The Gemara observes that the father's ability to remain calm and focused on the impurity of the knife serves to teach us that they regarded the *taharah* of the *keilim* more seriously than murder.

The Gemara (*ibid.* 23b) questions whether this was a sign of society's extreme concern for *taharas keilim*, or due to their lack of sensitivity toward murder. The Gemara brings evidence that the father's behaviour was due to his indifference to the act of murder. This story teaches that a great noble act may not always be what it appears. One must ascertain the true motive behind it.

When Pinchos displayed an exceptional act of zeal, surpassing even Moshe and Elozor, there was reason to question the purity of his motives. Was his reaction the result of holy indignation against

immorality or perhaps due to having an indifferent attitude towards spilling blood? The people shamed him, claiming that he had an inherited proclivity towards murder which led only him to commit such a remarkable deed, unlike other great men in the vicinity.

Therefore, the Torah draws attention to Pinchos' ancestor Ahron, known for his legendary love and concern for peace, to attest that this was the motive behind Pinchos' act. It was Pinchos' concern for the threat posed by Zimri's immorality that motivated his actions. His deed was not a result of inherent violent tendencies passed down from his butcher and murderer ancestors. Pinchos was a compassionate and caring person, the grandson of Ahron who was known for his love of peace, and his actions were driven by the desire to save the nation.

R' Leib cautions that when observing those who perform zealous acts not directed by the Gedolim, one should be skeptical about their motives. Some individuals justify everything in the name of "preserving Yiddishkeit," and it's important to consider whether their actions truly stem from their dedication to serving Hashem, or if they are just seeking a way to sin in a seemingly permissible and commendable manner.

The *possuk* teaches us about the two rewards that Pinchos was granted in recognition of his heroic act of killing Zimri. Hashem blessed him with a covenant of peace and with eternal priesthood. We know that Hashem always rewards and punishes in kind – *middah kneged middah*. How do these rewards reflect Pinchos' actions?

The Rosh Yeshiva *shlita* explains that Pinchos' zealous action achieved two things, with two corresponding rewards: Firstly, Pinchos facilitated peace between Hashem and Klal Yisroel by allowing Hashem's anger to subside. The plague, which was raging because of the חרון אף, ended with Pinchos' act. He was therefore rewarded with בְּרִית הַנְּשָׁלוֹם, *a covenant of peace*, for the peace he brought about between man and Hashem. Secondly, he helped Klal Yisroel achieve atonement, as the *possuk* says וַיִּכַּפֵּר עַל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, *and he atoned for the Bnei Yisroel*. His reward for attaining atonement for the people was the covenant of eternal priesthood. Pinchos and his family would provide the Kohanim Gedolim in the Beis HaMikdash, who would forever be instrumental in achieving atonement for Klal Yisroel.¹

It is important to always analyse acts of zealotry that are not expressed by our leaders. These acts involve promoting one ideal at the cost of another. One must probe the motive for these actions to determine if they are holy and pure, driven by a commitment to Torah and *mitzvos*, or if they stem from a lack of disregard for the issue at stake.

This Devar Torah is adapted from ספר וענפיה ארזי אל ומאורי שערים and is presented by the Gateshead Yeshiva Alumni Association. To receive by email, please register your interest by sending an email to parshasheet@gyalumni.org.

¹ [With the above explanation from R' Leib, we can understand the reward chosen for Pinchos on a deeper level. The Torah is affirming the connection between Pinchos' zealous act and his grandfather Ahron's greatness, and thus he was rewarded in ways that reflected Ahron HaKohen.]