

RABBI GOLDBERG'S *Parsha Perspectives* **FOR TODAY**

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Pinchas for your Shabbos Table

Excerpted from the shiur delivered on Tuesday, 20 Tamuz, 5782/July 19, 2022.

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DVAR TORAH FOR THE FRIDAY NIGHT MEAL

Never Tolerate the Intolerable

We read in Parshas Pinchas of God's announcement of the reward He would be giving to Pinchas בקנאו את קנאתי – literally, "for avenging My vengeance." During the incident of Ba'al Pe'or, as Benei Yisrael sinned with the women of Moav and worshipped their deity, Pinchas brazenly went ahead and killed Zimri and Kozbi – two violators who were committing a sinful act in public. Pinchas' zealotry brought an end to the devastating plague that Hashem had sent, which had killed 24,000 people. Now God announced that Pinchas would be rewarded for his zealotry.

Rav Yitzchak Blazer, in *Kochvei Or*, takes note of the fact that Hashem rewarded Pinchas not for intervening to stop the sinful act committed by Zimri and Kozbi, but rather בקנאו את קנאתי – for standing up for Hashem when nobody else did. As Zimri and Kozbi openly trampled on our most cherished values, our values of sanctity and nobility, everybody else looked on. They were afraid to act. They were too worried about being "cancelled." They didn't want to get involved. They preferred tolerating this conduct, figuring, "They're not hurting anyone; they're in love; why should this bother me?" But Pinchas refused to accept it. He put his reputation – and even his life – on the line, and took a bold, uncompromising stand in defense of Hashem's honor when nobody else had the courage to do so.

Of course, Pinchas' violent act of zealotry is not an example that we are encouraged or even allowed to follow. Chazal make it very clear that killing the perpetrators was sanctioned in this very specific case; generally, violence against sinners is not allowed and must never be deemed acceptable.

Nevertheless, the story of Pinchas is instructive for us in regard to the need to speak out and take a stand. There is no such thing as an "innocent bystander." We must never tolerate the intolerable. When egregious violations are taking place, we do not have the luxury to remain neutral, to stay out of it. We need to loudly and firmly object. When Hashem's blueprint for the world and for human society is being discarded, we cannot be too afraid or too tolerant to speak out.

The Gemara in Maseches Shabbos (119b) teaches, לא חרבה ירושלים אלא בשביל שלא הוכיחו זה את זה – Yerushalayim was destroyed because people did not speak out or object to misbehavior. They tolerated the intolerable. We might not be able to stop egregious misconduct, but this does not absolve us of the responsibility to take a stand and object to it.

Overcoming the Critical Impulse

Rashi, based on the Gemara (Sanhedrin 82b), comments that God announced His reward to Pinchas לפי שהיו השבטים מביזים אותו – because the people responded to his drastic action with scorn and derision. They pointed to the fact that Pinchas' maternal grandfather was Yisro, who had offered sacrifices to pagan gods. A person with such pedigree, they charged, could not possibly consider himself worthy of defending God's honor by killing a prominent person. (Zimri, the man whom Pinchas slew, was the leader of the tribe of Shimon.) Hashem therefore spoke to Moshe and affirmed that Pinchas acted out of sincere zealotry, genuinely seeking to defend Hashem's honor.

We must wonder, how could the people have possibly condemned Pinchas? Didn't they see what happened? The plague sent by God had killed 24,000 people. There were 24,000 funerals. Untold numbers of widows and orphans. A horrific tragedy! And it suddenly ended the moment Pinchas killed Zimri and Kozbi. How could the people not say "thank you"? How could they have complained and cast allegations at him?

The work *U'le'sitcha Elyon* answers, quite simply, that this is human nature. People have an instinct to avoid feeling beholden to somebody, to carry a debt of gratitude. And this instinct leads them to view others critically, to cynically find fault in what people do, to attribute to them nefarious motives. Benei Yisrael didn't want to feel grateful to Pinchas for saving their lives, and so they claimed that he wasn't sincere, that he was just a violent person, that he had anger issues, that he was influenced by his pagan roots.

This happened to Moshe, as well. He led the nation out of Egypt. He had the sea split. He brought the manna from the heavens. He pleaded to Hashem on the people's

behalf. And yet, *Chazal* teach us, the people suspected him of pocketing some of the precious materials donated for the *Mishkan*. They even suspected him of sleeping with married women. This is the critical instinct at work, the natural tendency to look at people cynically in order to avoid feelings of appreciation and indebtedness.

We see this type of cynicism all the time. People selflessly volunteer for community service, and they get criticized and condemned. They are accused of getting involved only for power and prestige, to feel important. This is human nature. And it's a nature that we need to try to resist. Instead of looking to criticize, we should look to compliment and appreciate. Instead of questioning people's motives, we should be grateful for what they do for us. Instead of trying to find fault, we should be trying to find reasons to admire and respect.

DVAR TORAH FOR THE SHABBOS DAY MEAL

The Reward of Peace

Hashem announced that He would be granting Pinchas a reward of peace – בריית שלום ("My covenant of peace" – 25:12).

Why was this specifically chosen as a suitable reward for Pinchas? Normally, Hashem rewards and punishes מידה כנגד מידה, in a manner that corresponds to the act which the person performed. In this instance, seemingly, the reward is the opposite of the act. Pinchas killed two people; how is peace a suitable reward?

Rav Yosef Sorotzkin, in *Megged Yosef*, explains based on an analogy given by Rav Chaim of Brisk. Rav Chaim noted that mice are chased by cats, and are also chased by housewives. At first glance, then, housewives are no different than cats; they both chase mice. But in truth, of course, there is no comparison whatsoever. The housewife who chases a mouse does not want to do this. She would much prefer that the mouse wouldn't be there. She runs after the mouse with a broom only out of necessity, to get it out of the house. This is not at all what she wants. The cat, however, wants to eat the mouse. And its greatest desire and hope is that another mouse will present itself afterward – and then another, and then another. It would love nothing more than to catch mice all day.

Rav Chaim explained that this is the difference between sincere zealotry and insincere zealotry. The sincere zealot does not want to be in a situation that necessitates protest. He wants to live in peace. He wants nothing at all to do with controversy. When he protests and opposes misconduct, he resembles the housewife, who needs to chase the mouse out of the house, and would have much preferred that the mouse had never come. The sincere zealot does not look for controversy; to the contrary, he prefers getting along peacefully with everybody, and he protests only out of necessity, against his will.

The insincere zealot is like the cat. It relishes controversy

and discord. After dealing with one "mouse," angrily protesting for one cause, he eagerly looks around for another. He is always searching for more "mice" to chase, for more opportunities for zealotry.

This is why Hashem rewarded Pinchas with peace. As Pinchas was a sincere zealot, somebody who relished peace, not controversy, this was the most fitting reward. He was a peaceful person, who had no interest in going around looking for people to be angry at. He acted as he did only due to necessity. And so he was blessed with בריית שלום – with the blessing of peace which he so cherished.

DVAR TORAH FOR SHALOSH SEUDOS

Neutralizing the Natural Effects of Zealotry

A different explanation of Pinchas' reward emerges from the comments of the *Or Ha'chayim* in a different context. The Torah in Parshas Ré'ei speaks of the עיר הנדחת – the city whose inhabitants all embrace idol worship, and which must therefore be eradicated. The entire population is to be killed. The Torah promises that if the nation complies with this command, then ונתן לך רחמים – God will respond by "granting you compassion."

The *Or Ha'chayim* explains that normally, killing people – even when this is necessary – results in the cultivation of a violent nature within the person. When a group would be sent to wage war against the עיר הנדחת and kill its entire population, there was a real concern that those who complete this mission would become violent. Their characters would be adversely affected by committing this act, even though it was done in the fulfillment of a *mitzva*. The Torah therefore assures that ונתן לך רחמים – Hashem would help those who kill the city's inhabitants so they retain their kind, gentle, merciful character.

The same can be applied to Pinchas. Hashem granted him בריית שלום, assuring that his act of killing two people would not have the effect of making him belligerent and violent. He would remain a calm, peace-loving person, and his gentle character would not be harmed as a result of what he did.

Many times, parents need to resort to somewhat harsh measures in the effort to educate and train their children. As much as they truly love their children and want to shower them with kindness and love, at times it becomes necessary to punish them or deny them things that they want. The danger arises that employing punitive measures could adversely affect the parents' characters. Even when these measures are appropriate, still, they could compromise the parents' qualities of kindness and sensitivity. Parents must strive to counterbalance this natural effect by redoubling their commitment to proper *middos*, to compassion and graciousness, to ensure that their *middos* do not suffer in any way as a result of the disciplinary measures that they must utilize for the purpose of *chinuch*.