

פ' פנחס תשפ"ג

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TORAH ZEALOTRY

“Pinchos the son of Elozor the son of Aharon the kohein has turned My anger away from the Bnei Yisroel by his zealously avenging Me among them, so that I did not destroy the Bnei Yisroel because of My zeal” (25:11)

This *possuk* implies that were it not for Pinchos’s act, the nation would have been destroyed. This teaches us the immense power of the *mesirus nefesh* of an individual and that even a small act has the power to assuage Hashem’s anger against the entire nation. Moreover, even a simple individual possesses this ability, because Pinchos was considered an ordinary Jew who did not hold any position: he arose from amongst the ordinary ranks of the nation.

Hashem intended to destroy the entire nation, because they did not oppose the *aveirah* with sufficient *mesirus nefesh*, even though they did not commit the *aveirah* themselves. Since all Jews are responsible for each other, if some members of the nation do not protest the sinful activities of other members, the former are considered to have sinned themselves. Hence, without Pinchos’s *kano’us*, the whole nation would have been punishable by death.

Rashi brings the *gemoro* that the tribes treated Pinchos with contempt, saying that someone whose mother's father had stuffed idols had now killed the leader of a Jewish tribe. These people were well aware that Pinchos had saved the lives of the whole nation, including their own, since everyone would have been destroyed by the *mageifo* were it not for his actions, but wicked people have always had the urge to speak against our great leaders. This is actually for the latter’s benefit, because the sins of *loshon horo* victims are transferred to those who have spoken against them.

TWO TYPES OF INACTION

The Seforno notes that the Torah emphasizes “*among them*” to teach us that Pinchos zealously avenged Hashem in public, and not in private, so that the public would be silent and not protest his actions. They would thereby receive atonement for having been silent and not having protested Zimri’s actions in the first place.

There are two types of people who do not participate in struggles against the wicked. Some are inactive in principle, in the belief that it is better to let the wicked do what they want and not interfere in their lives. Others are inactive because they believe themselves to be incapable of protesting.

The litmus test for determining which of these two groups a person belongs to lies in seeing his reaction to zealots who do protest the actions of the wicked. If he protests and shouts at them to stop their actions he has proved that he believes it to be wrong in principle to protest the actions of the wicked, and not that he is incapable of protesting, because otherwise he would not be protesting the actions of these zealots either. If, on the other hand, he remains silent upon witnessing the zealots’ actions that means that he is happy that they are acting this way, and the only reason he is not participating in their actions is because he believes he is not up to it.

That is the depth behind the Seforno’s explanation. When the nation remained silent at Pinchos’s act of zealotry they demonstrated that the reason they had not protested Zimri’s actions was not because they thought it to be wrong in principle to protest the actions of the wicked, but

only because they believed themselves to be incapable of protesting at all. Through their consistent behavior they obtained atonement for their initial inaction.

Rav Amram Blau was a famous *kano'i* who sat in prison on numerous occasions for his protests against *chillul Shabbos*. Rav Sternbuch recalls seeing him several times protesting ticket sales on Shabbos. Even when he was beaten mercilessly this did not deter him from his protests. Once Rav Amram complained to the Brisker Rov that only a small group of people participated in his demonstrations, and that if more would participate more could be achieved. The Brisker Rov replied: “Just be glad that people aren’t protesting against you and your protest actions” and he showed him this Seforno that the very fact that others do not protest the actions of zealots who are protesting provides atonement for those who do not protest. (Others relate this incident about the Satmar Rebbe and not Rav Amram Blau).

Nowadays small groups dedicate themselves to protests for the sake of Heaven, and some people not only do not participate in these actions, but are upset about them and try to prevent them. If they would only realize the importance of such protests that would atone for their failure to participate in them themselves.

PUBLIC OPINION

Pinchas acted in full view of the entire nation (“before the eyes of Moshe and before the eyes of the entire congregation of the *Bnei Yisroel*”: 25:6). The entire nation kept quiet, but Pinchas was not discouraged, and did not tell himself “how can I go out how and fight when everyone is standing there doing nothing?” He zealously avenged Hashem “among them”, i.e. whilst he was standing in the midst of the nation who were keeping quiet. “Therefore, say, ‘I hereby give him My covenant of peace’” (25:12), since he fought for the sake of Heaven without worrying what others will say or think. This teaches us not to be concerned about public opinion but only about performing the Will of Hashem. Those who act this way can sometimes save the whole world, as Pinchas did.

COMPROMISE FOR THE SAKE OF PEACE?

I hereby give him My covenant of peace” (25:12)

The *vov* in the word *sholom* (peace) is cut short (*ketuo*), so that it reads *shalem* (complete, whole). Since “the ways of the Torah are pleasant and all its paths lead to peace”, observing the Torah must perforce also lead to peace. However, sometimes we must abandon the ways of peace in order to preserve the completeness of the Torah and the Jewish nation. Our secular and quasi-religious brethren often preach that we should be more lenient, to make life easier for them. If only we would be more flexible, they say, they would be more amenable towards leading a religious lifestyle, or at least towards meeting our requirements.

Our response is that the Torah is not a man-made system of legislation, which is ours to dispense with based on the whims of any particular generation. Genuine peace cannot be achieved by cutting short even one letter of the Torah. When the *sheleimus* (completeness) of the Torah is at stake, preserving it takes precedence over preserving peace.

ZEALOTS AND AHAVAS YISROEL

It shall be for him and for his descendants after him as an eternal covenant of kehunoh, because he was zealous for his G-d and atoned for the Bnei Yisroel” (25:13)

The *possuk* says that Pinchos “*was zealous for his G-d,*” because genuine zealousness stems from a feeling of closeness to Hashem and pain over the desecration of the Divine Name by the wicked.

Pinchos “*was zealous for his G-d.*” He was zealous in spiritual matters for his G-d, but at the same time “*atoned for the Bnei Yisroel.*” His zealousness did not stem from negative character traits, but rather from love for his fellow Jews and concern to assuage Hashem’s anger.

The biggest fighters against wishy-washy views and against erring brethren were also famous for their *ahavas Yisroel*. Thus, Rav Chaim Brisker was known, on the one hand, as a staunch opponent of secularists and the Mizrachi, but, on the other hand, his house was open to any visitor to the extent that sometimes his own children did not have a bed to sleep on. The Satmar Rebbe, Rav Yoel Teitelbaum too, helped all fellow Jews with great self-dedication, without examining their background or views. Rav Sternbuch recalls how once when he was in Switzerland some Jews were imprisoned by the authorities, and money was needed to get them out. Someone sent a telegram to Rav Yoel and he immediately sent money to fulfil the *mitzvah* of *pidyon shvuyim*, even though he did not know any of these people. The house of Rav Amram Blau too was open to every needy person. He also told Rav Sternbuch that he was always careful never to mention the names of his opponents, because he fought against what they stood for and not against them personally.

Rav Sternbuch heard from Rav Elya Lopian that the Chofetz Chaim testified about his *rov*, Rav Leib Stavisker, a well-known fighter against our erring brethren, that before every action he took against them, he would pray a lot, sometimes for hours, to be saved from stumbling in his battles, that he would be successful in acting purely for the sake of Heaven and fulfilling Hashem’s Will, without engaging in forbidden speech or hurting anyone’s feelings against *halocho*.

INHERITED TRAITS

It shall be for him and for his descendants after him as an eternal covenant of Kehunah (25:13)

If someone displays self-dedication in his actions that is a sign that he is not merely performing *mitzvos* by rote, because his father and grandfather did the same thing, but he has rather internalized the significance of Torah and *mitzvos* to the extent that they have become an integral part of him, and he conducts himself accordingly.

A person’s character traits are passed on to future generations, and when someone has succeeded in sanctifying himself to the point that he feels a strong desire to perfect his *avodas Hashem*, those qualities become an inseparable part of him and are therefore passed on to his descendants. Through his actions, Pinchas demonstrated that his love of Hashem and his desire to create a *kiddush Hashem* had become an inherent part of his personality, and he was rewarded by having descendants who inherited the *Kehunah* from him.

In a similar vein the Chofetz Chaim expounded the *possuk* “*And these words, which I command you this day, shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children*” as follows: if you display self-dedication in the education of your children, if you choose the best tutors for them, show an interest in their activities and welfare, keep tabs on their progress, and make a point of investing time and learning with them, that is a sign that you have internalized the Torah, that it is upon your heart, and that you love and fear Hashem.

MISQUOTING CHAZAL

At the *seudas bris* of the Brisker Rov's grandson a *rov* who was present there said that *Chazal* explain that Pinchos was not chosen as the leader to replace Moshe because he was a zealot, and such people are not appropriate to act as leaders since leaders have to be soft and overflowing with love for their fellow Jews. Upon hearing this the Brisker Rov became upset and immediately said that there was no such *Chazal* anywhere, and, in truth, the opposite is the case: even the biggest *kano'i* could appropriately become leader of the nation, since Torah zealotry stems from love of one's fellow Jew and concern for the public good.

The real reason Pinchas was not chosen has nothing to do with any deficiency on his part *chas vesholom*, but is to be found in Rashi at the beginning of *Ovos*, who explains that the Torah was transmitted through Yehoshua rather than Elozor, Pinchas or the Seventy Elders because Yehoshua had not left Moshe's tent since his youth, and having been *meshamesh* him in this manner he was best qualified for the task of replacing him. Similarly, the Brisker Rov once told Rav Sternbuch that although many people had learnt with his father, Rav Chaim, not everyone who had done so could legitimately be termed his "*talmid*", but only those who had cleaved to him and had striven to emulate both his *limud haTorah* and his conduct and character traits.

LEGISLATION OF IMMORALTY

"*Harass the Midianites, and smite them*" (25:17)

The *gemoro* (Shabbos 64a) says that the nation needed atonement for the war with Midian, because even though they did not sin they did not avoid sinful thoughts, and those are even more severe than the physical sin.

In recent times, dramatic changes have been taking place in the United States and elsewhere with regard to the registration of immoral marriages. This could *chas vesholom* have a severe negative impact on all Jews wherever they are, because whenever the spirit of *tumoh* increases, that has an impact on the entire world. For example, in the days of the *mabul*, due to the *tumoh* that was prevalent in the world at the time, even the animals changed their nature. Therefore, when *tumoh* becomes more intense amongst the non-Jewish public, our own *nisyonos* become more severe.

On the other hand, these developments are also a source of hope for us, since the *midas hadin* seeks to act as prosecutor by pointing to the *tumoh* in our midst stemming from things such as the Internet, but now that the *tumoh* of the non-Jewish world has stooped to new levels of depravity, even to the point of enshrining it in legislation, our own sins have been attenuated to an extent by way of comparison, and with this *limud zechus* Hashem can state, "Who can be compared to My Nation".

Similarly, Rabbi Meir of Premishlan would say that he is happy when non-Jewish holidays come around, because then the difference between us and them becomes clear. They get drunk and dissolute on their holidays, removing all yokes, whereas we on our holidays, conduct ourselves with *kedusha* and *tahara*, spending the day praying and cleaving to Hashem.

Anyone who takes the opportunity now to fight the *yetzer horo* will enjoy special divine assistance to overcome it, because when *tumoh* is on the increase, *kedusha* acquires a corresponding potential to increase too, as it says "G-d has made one corresponding to the other" (*Koheles* 7:14)

Hence, our obligation at this time is to increase the side of *kedusha* and to encourage our children to do the same. If we overcome this last *nisyon* before *moshiach* we will witness wonders speedily in our time.

SPIRITUAL HEIRS

If a man dies and has no son, you shall transfer his inheritance to his daughter (27:8)

The *gemoro* (*Masseches Bovo Basro* 116a) derives from this *possuk* that whoever does not leave a son behind to inherit him Hashem becomes angry with him. If someone has not been fortunate enough to leave behind a son, what sin has he committed?

The inheritance referred to here is not a monetary or physical bequest, but rather that of a son who continues in the path of his father after his demise. If a person does not make the financial and emotional investments in the education of his children required to ensure the future transmission of the Torah and the values of our forefathers, he is held responsible for this failure.

In addition to physical sons, a person leaves his mark through students, or anyone on whom he has had a positive influence during his lifetime. Any time they continue on the path set out by the deceased they bring about the everlasting elevation of his *neshomo*, so that he is amply rewarded for his efforts in this world.

TWO TYPES OF RABBIS

“Let Hashem... set a man over the congregation, who will go forth before them and come before them, who will lead them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of Hashem will not be like sheep without a shepherd” (27:16-17)

There are two types of shepherds. One type works for a living and only performs his duties when he receives a salary from his employer. He does not take care of the needs of his flock beyond that. Another type is dedicated to his flock, and looks after them at all times, because he cares for them.

Similarly, there are two types of rabbis. Some work for a salary and only perform their duties on the minimum level required of them. Others, however, do everything they can for the sake of their congregants, since they act for the sake of Heaven.

Moshe *Rabbenu* was asking Hashem that the congregation should not be like sheep without a shepherd, that they should not have a leader who sometimes does not take care of their needs, but rather one who is available at all times and supervises his congregants, not leaving them alone for a minute.

Since Moshe knew that it is very difficult for a person to discern how someone would fulfil his functions as rabbi, he asked Hashem to choose for the nation a worthy leader who would not abandon his flock, but rather dedicate himself to them unstintingly.

ROV AS A ROLE MODEL

Appoint a man over the congregation, who will go forth before them and come before them... take for yourself Yehoshua the son of Nun, a man of spirit. (27:16–18).

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach explained that a *Rov*'s influence over his community is not due to speeches alone, but everything depends on his personal conduct. Only someone who speaks from the heart and sets a personal example can influence his congregants. He “goes forth before them and comes before them,” and wherever he goes, in all his actions, he serves as a role model and practices what he preaches. He is a “man of spirit,” his speeches come straight from the heart, and his personal life is run in accordance with the will of Hashem.

Rav Chaim Chaikel Greenberg told Rav Sternbuch that when he went to see Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky he asked about the tasks and duties of a communal Rabbi. Rav Chaim Ozer told him that one of his duties is to sit and learn with *hasmadah*, because this makes a great impression on his congregants, and they will seek to emulate him.

GRAB WHAT YOU CAN

“The one lamb you shall offer up in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer up in the afternoon” (28:4)

The Sifri on this *possuk* says, “This teaches us that if he did not offer up the morning sacrifice, he offers up the afternoon sacrifice”

This principle applies to all areas of *avodas Hashem*. Someone who did not learn properly during the first half of the day, should not imagine that all is lost, and that there is no point in going back to learning. Instead, he should muster up the will power to learn vigorously the rest of the day. Similarly, if someone has not concentrated properly during the first half of *davening*, and even if he is already towards the end, he should not tell himself that since he has already missed almost the whole *tefila*, it would be pointless to try to concentrate at this stage. The truth is that what he has done until then has no connection to the present, and he can still grab whatever remains.

The Chofetz Chaim in his introduction to *Shmiras Haloshon* brings a parable in the name of a *gaon*. A girl was holding a large basket of vegetables to sell them in the market when a thief came along and started grabbing her goods from the basket. The girl became frightened and did not know what to do. An inspector who was passing by told the girl, “Why are you just standing there? Don’t wait until he has grabbed everything, just like he is grabbing, you should also be grabbing, and everything you grab will remain yours”. Similarly, if someone’s evil inclination has succeeded in putting extraneous thoughts into his mind so that he has missed several *brochos* from his *tefila*, he should not be foolish enough to miss the rest also, but rather grab whatever he still can, and that way reap the profit of whatever he can manage.

In the case of *loshon horo* too, adds the Chofetz Chaim, the *yetzer horo* attempts to deceive a person that there is no point in stopping to make forbidden statements, since he has stumbled so many times in the past, and will not succeed in undoing his old habits completely. The person should respond to the *yetzer horo* that if it has succeeded in vanquishing him one day, there is no reason to give up everything and do the same tomorrow. We should try to grab whatever we can, because for each item of forbidden speech a person holds back he merits a reward so great that no angel or other creature can fathom it.

JEWISH LEADERS

And he took Yehoshua. (28:22). He took him [by encouraging him] with words, and informed him of the reward in store for the leaders of Yisroel in the World to Come. (Rashi, ibid.)

A Rebbe once noted that the rewards awaiting Jewish leaders are limited to the World to Come, since in this world they often endure only suffering for their actions. Yehoshua had witnessed how the nation had treated Moshe Rabbeinu since he took them out of Egypt. Instead of being grateful for his selflessness to them to the extent of being ready to have his name struck off from the Torah for their sake, they accused him of stealing, and even of adultery. Yehoshua knew that any leader of the Jewish nation could not expect any satisfaction in this world from his thankless task, and so Moshe had to encourage him by emphasizing the rewards awaiting him in the hereafter.

Lay leaders of the community and *askanim*, too, should not expect any gratitude or rewards for their actions in this world, but they will be amply rewarded in the World to Come for all their deeds.