

## **TorahFax: Pinchas**

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Monday, Tammuz 14, 5783 (Hakhel Year) July 3, 2023

This week's Parsha is Pinchas. Pinchas was the son of Elazar and grandson of Aaron, the High Priest.

The Parsha begins with G-d gifting Pinchas with the special honor of becoming a kohen (priest) and serving in the Tabernacle. This gift was given to him and all his descendants after him for all generations. The Torah calls it, "The covenant of Shalom-peace."

The Jewish people are divided or should I say, united..) in three categories: Kohen, Levi & Yisrael. The kohen is the higher level of holiness, which qualifies them to perform the service of G-d in the Holy Temple. In fact, most of the High Priests in the Holy Temple were descendants of Pinchas.

Q. The priesthood is referred here to as, "The covenant of Shalom – peace."  
What is the connection between, "The covenant of peace," and being a kohen?

A. In the first chapter of Pirkei Avot (Chapters of our Fathers), Hillel the Elder says, "Be of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving your fellow and bringing them closer to the Torah."

Aaron was Pinchas' grandfather. Loving peace and pursuing peace were the characteristics of Aaron the High Priest. When G-d granted Pinchas the gift of

Priesthood, He expressed this gift by giving him the covenant of peace, which represents the priesthood.

The three-fold priestly blessing to the Jewish people, which is recited by the kohen during the holidays and in Israel each Shabbat and in many places in Israel each day, ends with the blessing of peace: "May the L-rd bless you and guard you. May the L-rd make His countenance shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the L-rd turn His countenance toward you and grant you Shalom-peace."

Q. G-d rewards in accordance with the good deed performed - measure for measure. How does the reward of "covenant of peace" fit with the act which Pinchas did, for which this reward was given?

A. Pinchas was rewarded here for his heroic act of killing a leader of the tribe of Shimon, when he sinned with a Midyonite woman. By killing him, Pinchas stopped a plague which already killed 24,000 people. Not everyone agreed with what Pinchas did. Many of the tribes criticized Pinchas for doing this. They said that Pinchas was motivated by anger and temperament, not for the sake of saving the Jewish nation. G-d rewarded Pinchas with the covenant of peace to show that his act was an act which brought peace, as it stopped the plague.

There is another lesson here: G-d rewards Pinchas for his act by making him a Kohen, but expresses His reward with words, "Covenant of Peace." This is to tell Pinchas, and by extension to all leaders, that as a leader of the people, although there are times when force and strength is required, it should be used only in extreme cases. All other times, the approach of peace/Shalom is the better and proper way. As Hillel the Elder states, "Be of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace

and pursuing peace, loving your fellow and bringing them closer to the Torah." Peace, love and positive actions are the best way to bring people closer to G-d and the Torah.

Tuesday, Tammuz 15, 5783 (Hakhel Year) July 4, 2023

As mentioned yesterday, the name of this week's Parsha is Pinchas, who was the son of Elazar and grandson of Aaron, the High Priest.

The Torah tells us that because of Pinchas' courage and quick thinking, which stopped a plague which took the lives of 24,000 Jews, G-d gave him the gift of the priesthood, proclaiming him and his descendants to be Kohanim (priests). Although, his father and grandfather were kohanim, Pinchas himself was not a kohen until this point.

Q. According to Jewish law, a son of a Kohen is automatically a Kohen from birth. Pinchas was the son of a Kohen and grandson of Aaron, the High Priest, why wasn't he a Kohen until now?

A. When G-d proclaimed Aaron and his four sons as Kohanim (priests) at the time when the Tabernacle was constructed, it was only for them and their children who will be born afterwards. Pinchas, who was already born at that time, wasn't included. He became a Kohen only when he stopped the plague, for which G-d rewarded him with the priesthood. The Torah calls it, "A covenant of Shalom-peace."

Q. Why was he rewarded with the priesthood? And why is this called, "the covenant of peace?"

A. Our sages in Pirkei Avot (Chapters of our Fathers) say, "Be of the disciples of Aaron, love peace and pursue peace." Aaron the High Priest was a person who loved peace and went out of his way to make peace between husband and wife and between people. A Kohen is called "a man of peace." Because Pinchas brought about peace between G-d and the people and as a result, the plague which took 24,000 lives, stopped, G-d gave him the gift of "peace" by proclaiming him a kohen.

On the lighter side: Hymie, who wasn't familiar with Jewish tradition, lost his father. His father's last wish was that he say Kaddish after him. Hymie obeyed and every day went to shul to recite the kaddish. One day, he comes to the rabbi and says, "Rabbi, I see that being a kohen is a great honor. He gets called up to the Torah first and blesses the congregation. I would love to become a kohen.

"It's impossible," replied the rabbi. I cannot make you a kohen. Being a wealthy man, he tried his luck. "Rabbi, I will donate \$25,000 to the synagogue building fund, if you make me a kohen. "Impossible," said the rabbi. Hymie was not one to give up. "How about \$50,000.. \$100,000?"

The rabbi was very curious. "Look Hymie, I'm not a kohen either. Most Jews are not kohanim. Why does it mean so much to you to become a kohen?"

Hymie replied, "Rabbi, You see, my grandfather was a kohen, my father was a kohen and I too, would like to be a kohen.."

Being a kohen is a birth rite. Pinchas was the only person who, after the building of the tabernacle, was not born a kohen, but later became a kohen. It

never happened again in Jewish history. Many of his descendants served as High Priests in the Holy Temple.

Thursday, Tammuz 17, 5783 (Hakhel Year) July 6, 2023

Today (Thursday), the 17th of Tammuz, known as Shiva Asar B'Tammuz, is a fast day decreed by the sages, in association with the destruction of the Holy Temples in Jerusalem.

Q. Why do we commemorate tragic events through fasting?

A. Our sages explain that the Temples were destroyed as a result of the sins of the people. The way to correct them is through repentance and bettering our ways. Fasting is a way to bring a person to humility and thus get the people to repent and fix their ways. Thus, say our sages that the fasting is not the end result. It is a means to get us to properly repent.

Q. What happened on the 17th of Tammuz?

A. Five tragic events occurred on this day in the course of Jewish history:

1) The First Tablets were broken on the 17th of Tammuz, in the Hebrew year 2448. After spending 40 days on Mount Sinai, Moshe descended from the mountain with The Two Tablets. Upon seeing the people worshipping the Golden Calf, Moshe broke the Tablets on which the Ten Commandments were engraved. Worshipping the Golden Calf was one of the greatest sins performed by the Jewish people.

2) The two mandatory daily sacrifices were stopped. Two sacrifices, called, "Korban Tamid," were brought upon the altar in the Temple each day, as we read in this week's Parsha, Pinchas. One was offered in the morning and one in the evening. The morning sacrifice was the first offering of the day and the evening one was the last sacrifice of the day. This went on for hundreds of years. When the city of Jerusalem was under siege it became difficult to obtain animals for sacrifices. It was on the 17th of Tammuz that the Tamid sacrifice was stopped.

3) The walls of Jerusalem were breached. On this day, the Romans succeeded in breaching the walls of the Holy city of Jerusalem, which eventually led to the fall of the city.

4) A Torah was burnt. Apustmus, captain of the Roman occupation forces, publicly burned the Torah Scroll on the 17th of Tammuz.

5) An idol was placed in the Beth Hamikdash (Holy Temple) on this day. Idol worshipping is the gravest sin in Judaism. For all of the above, the 17th day of Tammuz was decreed a fast day.

The 17th of Tammuz begins the "Three Week" period called, "Bein Hamtzarim" ("between the straits"), which ends with Tisha B'Av (9th of Av), the day in which both Holy Temples were destroyed.

Weddings are not performed during these three weeks, as we remember and mourn the destruction of the Holy Temples in Jerusalem. May we merit the coming of Moshiach and the rebuilding of the Holy Temple very soon! May we merit everlasting peace for Israel, in Israel and everywhere. Amen!

Friday, Tammuz 18, 5783 (Hakhel Year) July 7, 2023

The Hebrew calendar is filled with historical events which we commemorate throughout the year. Some dates celebrate happy events which happened to our people. Others recall times of difficulty and tragedy experienced by our forefathers.

We are now in the midst of the "Three Weeks," which commemorate one of the saddest events in Jewish history. During these Three Weeks, which began yesterday, July 6th and ends, Thursday, July 27th, we remember/mourn the destruction of the two Holy Temples.

Remembering the destruction of the Temple plays an important role in a Jew's everyday life. In each of the daily prayers, we ask G-d for the rebuilding of the Holy Temple. On the happiest occasion, at the marriage ceremony, the groom breaks a glass under the Chupah to recall the destruction of the Temple.

Every religious event teaches us a lesson, as the name "Torah" ("teaching") implies. Remembering a particular date of the past, according to Torah, teaches us how we should act in the present.

Our sages explain that during these "Three Weeks" a person should reflect on what caused the destruction of the Temple. Understanding the reasons for the destruction of the Temples, will help us understand how to correct the situation so that we may merit the rebuilding of the Temple in our time.

The First Temple was destroyed as a result of idol worship, when the Jewish people turned away from G-d. The Second Temple was destroyed when people

turned against each other, breaking the commandment of "Love your fellow as yourself."

During the days of the Temple, G-dliness was presented in an open and revealed form. With the destruction of the Holy Temple, G-dliness is in a state of "hiding" and miracles do not occur in a revealed manner as then. As a result, seeing G-dliness and experiencing holiness takes much more effort.

Rabbi Baruch of Mezibush once found his young son crying. "Why are you crying?" Rabbi Baruch asked. "My friends and I were playing hide & seek. When it was my turn to hide, I hid but after a long time, I realized that they stopped looking for me! They forgot about me!" the child replied sobbingly.

Rabbi Baruch calmed the child and then said, "This is exactly what G-d is crying about. He also hid from us, as a result of our sins, but the purpose of His hiding is so that we shall search and seek Him. G-d promised that if we search, we will find Him. G-d cries, "Why we forgot the reason for His hiding and stopped looking for Him?"

The "Three Weeks" is a time to increase our performance of mitzvot, especially in the mitzvot of "Love your fellow as yourself," giving charity and performing acts of goodness. Through these mitzvot we make amends for the sins which caused the destruction of the Temple and through these mitzvot we shall "find G-d" and thus He will hasten the ultimate redemption and the rebuilding of the Holy Temple, with the coming of Moshiach. Amen.