

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת פינחס

פינחס בן אלעזר בן אהרן הכהן השיב את חמתי מעל בני ישראל בקנאו את קנאתי בתוכם ולא כליתי את בני ישראל בקנאתי
“Pinchas son of Elazar son of Aharon the Priest turned back my wrath from upon the Children of Israel, when he zealously avenged My vengeance among them, so I did not consume the Children of Israel in My wrath” (25:11)

The Kosnos Or notes that Pinchas is praised precisely because he zealously defended the Torah. In today's society, zealous acts are to be avoided. It is considered better if one is considerate of others and tolerates their decisions and behaviors. Modern day examples are the concern for the mental state of the Virginia Tech gunman and the allowance of public parades and displays advocating deviant lifestyles. Speaking out against these people would be considered insensitive and inconsiderate. This is not the way of the Torah. The zealous act of Pinchas was not divisive. Instead, it ended the plague and it brought peace. Pinchas was rewarded with a covenant of peace in kind. One should not be afraid to speak out against wrongdoing, provided that he does so in an appropriate manner. Although on the surface it seems counterproductive, it will result in peace.

והיתה לו ולזרעו אחריו ברית כהנת עולם תחת אשר קנא לאלקיו ויכפר על בני ישראל
“And it shall be for him and his offspring after him a covenant of eternal priesthood, because he took zealous vengeance for his God, and he brought atonement for the Children of Israel” (25:13)

Why does the posuk say that "Pinchas was zealous for his God?" The Chomas Aish answers that Pinchas could have decided that there were greater people around to execute Zimri. After all, Moshe and the seventy elders were all great men. Nevertheless, Pinchas felt that it was his personal duty to resolve the situation. He was indeed zealous for his God because he felt that it was entirely up to him. A person should always feel as if he is the only one who can accomplish a task. The popular saying states: "If you want something done right, do it yourself." This is the attitude that a person should take to mitzvos as well. He should not leave it up to others who will do it.

צרו את המדינים והכיתם אותם
“Harass the Midianites and smite them” (25:17)

The Midrash Rabba comments on this posuk that the punishment for enticing a person to sin is greater than actually causing that person physical harm. The people of Mitzrayim and Edom wanted to harm the Jews physically. Their descendants may

marry into the Jewish people after three generations. Moav, on the other hand, along with Amon, devised a plan to lead the Jews to sin. Their descendants may never marry into the Jewish people. The women of Midian were the ones who actually caused the Jews to sin. In retribution, the Jews killed every male from Midian, enslaved their women and children and took their livestock. The punishment was much greater for the spiritual attack than for the physical one. When one causes spiritual harm to another person, the harm has an effect that lasts much longer and is much deeper than the physical harm. Physical harm kills a person physically but he still receives a spiritual reward in the world to come. Spiritual harm deprives a person of both worlds.

One must be careful regarding the ways that he influences those around him. Sometimes, people are learn by example if they see someone doing something wrong, especially if that person is well-respected. We must be aware of our actions at all times because if we make a wrong move, someone who sees may learn from what we have done. It is a great responsibility and one must always be aware of it.

ויהי אחרי המגפה ויאמר ה' אל משה ואל אלעזר בן אהרן הכהן לאמר
“It was after the plague - Hashem spoke to Moshe and to Elazar son of Aharon the Priest, saying” (26:1)

There is a break in the Sefer Torah in the middle of this posuk after the mention of the plague and Hashem's command to count the Jewish people. What is the reason for this space? The Baal HaTurim comments that the Torah wishes to distance the plague from the counting of the Jews. There were times when a counting of the Jews led to a plague because of an improper census, as in the times of Dovid HaMelech. The Torah wants to distance any mention of a plague in connection to a counting, a time when the people are particularly susceptible to a plague.

ראובן בכור ישראל בני ראובן חנוך משפחת החנכי לפלוא משפחת הפלאי
“Reuven the firstborn of Israel – the sons of Reuven: of Chanoch, the Chanochite family; of Palu, the Paluite family” (26:5)

Rashi says that the nations of the world were ridiculing the Jews for dividing into families by their fathers. They mocked that this was futile because the Egyptians surely had seized some of the Jewish women at times and thus their descendants did not share the same father. Therefore, each family name is surrounded in the Torah by a “yud” at the end and a “hey” and the beginning so that they each contain the name of Hashem, thereby bearing Hashem’s stamp of approval on the validity of their heritage.

Why does the Torah only disprove this theory at this point in time, forty years after they left Egypt? After Zimri sinned with the Midianite woman, there was a concern that this mixture between Jews and non-Jews had also happened in the past in Egypt. Because of this, it was necessary to put the rumor to rest at this time.

ותקרבנה בנות צלפחד בן חפר בן גלעד בן מכיר בן מנשה למשפחת מנשה בן

יוסף ואלה שמות בנתיו מחלה נעה וחגלה ומלכה ותרצה
“The daughters of Tzelafchad, son of Chefer, son of Gilad, son of Machir, son of Menashe, of the families of Menashe son of Yosef drew - and these are the names of his daughters: Machla, Noah, Chagla, Milka and Tirtza” (27:1)

What is the connection between the story of the daughters of Tzelafchad and the previous section which states that all the Jewish men died in the wilderness? The Midrash Rabba answers that the men died because they had cried upon hearing the report of the spies. Their love of Eretz Yisrael was lacking and they were upset by what they heard. The women had a much greater love for Eretz Yisrael and did not fall prey to the evil report of the spies. That is why only the men died in the wilderness. The contrast between the men and women is brought out by juxtaposing the death of the men to the desire of the daughters of Tzelafchad to receive a portion of land in Eretz Yisrael.

וביום הבכורים בהקריבכם מנחה חדשה לה' בשבעתיכם מקרא קדש יהיה לכם כל מלאכת עבדה לא תעשו
“On the day of the first fruits, when you offer a new meal-offering to Hashem on your Festival of Weeks, it shall be a holy convocation to you; you shall not do any laborious work” (28:26)

Why does the Torah refer to the sacrifice of Shavuot as a new offering? Shavuot is the celebration of the giving of the Torah. The Torah must always have a freshness and must always feel new. When learning and mitzvos begin to feel old and stale, one feels that they are not very important. A person must find ways to preserve the feeling that he has when doing a mitzva for the first time and to experience that each and every time he does that mitzva. A person can buy new sefarim or learn something new or approach a mitzva from a new perspective. One should do whatever he can to prevent his mitzva observance from feeling like a chore and injecting enthusiasm into mitzvos that a person does every day.

Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur
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