

Parashat Pinchas, 5780, 2020:

Rabbi David Etengoff

Pinchas and Eliyahu

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, Chaya Sarah bat Reb Yechezkel Shraga, Shmuel Yosef ben Reuven, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Moshe ben Itta Golda, Yocheved Dafneh bat Dinah Zehavah, Reuven Shmuel ben Leah and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The end of last week's *parasha*, Parashat Balak, narrates the story in which many of the men of our people pursued the women of Moab and their god Baal Peor:

Israel settled in Shittim, and the people began to commit harlotry with the daughters of the Moabites. They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and prostrated themselves to their gods. Israel became attached to Baal Peor, and the anger of the Lord flared against Israel. (*Sefer Bamidbar 25:1-3*, all Bible translations, *The Judaic Press Complete Tanach*)

If this was not bad enough, Zimri ben Salu, the prince of the tribe of Shimon, then publicly began to consort with a Midianite woman:

Then an Israelite man came and brought the Midianite woman to his brethren, before the eyes of Moses and before the eyes of the entire congregation of the children of Israel... (25:6)

When Pinchas witnessed this gross public immorality, he acted on the Torah's mandate and executed Zimri and his Midianite woman. In our *parasha*, Pinchas' actions were rewarded with Hashem's highest approbation, namely, he received the *brit shalom* (Covenant of Peace) — the *brit kehunat olam* (Eternal Covenant of the Priesthood):

Pinchas the son of Eleazar the son of Aaron the *kohen* has turned My anger away from the children of Israel by his zealously avenging Me among them, so that I did not destroy the children of Israel because of My zeal. Therefore, say, "I hereby give him My covenant of peace. It shall be for him and for his descendants after him [as] an Eternal Covenant of the Priesthood, because he was zealous for his G-d and atoned for the children of Israel." (11-13)

In his gloss on *Sefer Bamidbar* 25:6, Rashi notes, “At the incident of the Golden Calf, Moses [successfully] confronted six hundred thousand as it says, ‘He ground it [the Golden Calf] until it was powder...’” Clearly, then, Moshe, no less than Pinchas, sought to avenge G-d’s glory. Yet, Pinchas alone received the *brit kehunat olam*. This is an exegetical challenge that has captivated our commentators’ attention throughout the ages. In my opinion, Rabbi Baruch Halevi Epstein (1860-1941) suggests one of the most cogent solutions to this problem. Here is a paraphrase of his position:

It is true that Moshe removed Hashem’s anger from the Jewish people on a number of occasions, including the episodes of the Golden Calf and the Spies. Yet, this was for only a relatively short period of time. As a result, the reconciliation between G-d and the Jewish people that Moshe had achieved was not on the level of complete peace. In stark contrast, Pinchas was able to bring about a complete reconciliation that totally removed any anger from Hashem toward our people. Therefore, Pinchas, and Pinchas alone, was rewarded with Hashem’s Covenant of Peace. (*Torah Temimah* on *Sefer Bamidbar*, chapter 25, comment 24)

In sum, according to Rav Epstein, since Pinchas achieved a total reconciliation between Hashem and the Jewish people, he was deserving of the Covenant of Peace.

The peace that Pinchas was able to bring about motivated *Chazal* (our Sages of blessed memory) to identify Eliyahu the Prophet (9th century BCE) as Pinchas’ spiritual reincarnation:

Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said: “Pinchas is Eliyahu.” The Holy One Blessed be He said to Pinchas: “You have placed peace between Me and the Jewish people in this world; so, too, shall you do so in the future.” As the text states: “Lo, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of the L-rd, that he may turn the heart of the fathers back through the children, and the heart of the children back through their fathers...[*Sefer Malachi* 3:23-24]” (*Midrash Yalkut Shimoni*, Pinchas I, translation my own)

Chazal further underscore the role of Eliyahu as the herald of *shalom ba’olam* (peace in the world) in a parallel text to our midrash, found in the concluding *mishnah* of *Mishnah*

Eduyot:

And the Sages said: [Eliyahu] will come to bring about peace in our world. As the text states: “Lo, I will send you Eliyahu the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of the L-rd, that he may turn the heart of the fathers back through the children, and the heart of the children back through their fathers...” [*Sefer Malachi* 3:23-24]”

Chazal teach us time and time again that Eliyahu’s ultimate purpose is to herald the coming of the *Mashiach*. What will this soon- to-be-realized period be like? Yeshayahu, the great 8th century BCE prophet and sage, offered one of the most famous descriptions of this longed-for time:

And it shall be at the end of the days, that the mountain of the L-rd’s house shall be firmly established at the top of the mountains, and it shall be raised above the hills, and all the nations shall stream to it. And many peoples shall go, and they shall say, “Come, let us go up to the L-rd’s mount, to the house of the G-d of Jacob, and let Him teach us of His ways, and we will go in His paths,” for out of Zion shall the Torah come forth, and the word of the L-rd from Jerusalem. And he shall judge between the nations and reprove many peoples, and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift the sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. (*Sefer Yeshayahu* 2:2-4)

May the *Mashiach* come soon and in our days to rebuild the *Beit Hamikdash* and bring everlasting peace to all mankind. *V’chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom, and may Hashem in His great mercy remove the *magafah* from *klal Yisrael* and from all the nations of the world.

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>
They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org> using the search criteria Etengoff and the *parasha*’s name.

The email list, *b’chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

*** My audio *shiurim* on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpvd>

*** I have posted 164 of **Rabbi Soloveitchik's** English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.