

Parashat Pinchas 5784, 2024:

Of Anger and Peace

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ה' יעזור וירחם על אחינו כל בני ישראל, בארץ ישראל ובכל חלקי הארץ

Moshe Rabbeinu's accomplishments are legendary, his leadership was extraordinary, and his intellect was nearly unparalleled. Moreover, the level of *nevuah* he achieved was different in kind and degree than any other prophet who ever lived. As the Torah states: “There never arose another prophet amongst the Jewish people like Moshe, to whom Hashem revealed Himself face to face.” (*Sefer Devarim* 34:10, my translation, as per Onkelos).

Rabbi Baruch ha-Levi Epstein *zatzal* (1860-1942), known as the “Torah Temimah” after the title of his Torah commentary, explains that there was one objective that Moshe did not realize which Pinchas was able to achieve:

“Therefore, let it be said: ‘Behold, I [Hashem] give to him [Pinchas] my Covenant of Peace” (*Bamidbar* 25:12). “It is fitting that this atonement [as seen in the words ‘Covenant of Peace’] will continue to bring about expiation forevermore” (*Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin*, 82b). At first glance, it is very difficult to understand why Pinchas merited this explicit reward even more than *Moshe Rabbeinu*, since we find numerous times wherein [through Moshe’s efforts] Hashem “forgot” His anger against the Jewish people, such as in the instances of the Golden Calf and the Spies. (*Torah Temimah, Sefer Bamidbar*, Section 24, translations, underlining, brackets and emphasis my own)

After raising this fundamental issue, Rav Epstein continues his analysis as to why Pinchas, and not Moshe, was deserving of the Covenant of Peace:

But the matter should, however, be explained in the following manner: We see from this that there was a fundamental difference that obtained between Moshe’s and Pinchas’ ability to remove Hashem’s anger [from upon the Jewish people]. Moshe was able to remove Hashem’s anger for *a limited time*, and there remained, so to speak, in Hashem’s heart (mind) a grievance against the Jewish people, just as we find in the instances of the Golden Calf...and the Spies. Peace such as

this cannot be called true and absolute peace. The removal of Hashem's anger in regards to Pinchas, however, was a complete and total removal of anger [that continues to last]. Therefore, Pinchas merited the just reward [of the Covenant of Peace].

In sum, Pinchas was able to bring about a total and permanent peace between Hashem and His people that was free of any future recriminations and punishments. This is something that escaped even *Moshe Rabbeinu's* grasp. Yet, why did this difference obtain?

I believe the Torah provides us with an answer: "When he [Pinchas] displayed the anger that I [Hashem] should have displayed." (*Bamidbar* 25:11, translation per Rashi's second gloss on *Bamidbar* 25:11). Herein, Pinchas acted as Hashem's messenger in expressing His legitimate anger. He channeled Hashem's fury in response to the vulgar immorality and idol worship undertaken by many of the men with the women of Moab. In this sense, Pinchas was a zealot who was totally devoted to Hashem. His entire being merged with Hashem's righteous anger in his desire to execute the Almighty's will.

Paradoxically, Pinchas received the *Brit Shalom* (Covenant of Peace) after having brought about total peace between Hashem and *klal Yisrael*, precisely because of the righteous anger he expressed on behalf of the Almighty. In this way, he served as a protective force and bridged the chasm between Hashem and the Jewish people and guarded His holy Torah and *mitzvot*. As spiritually heroic as Pinchas' zealotry was, however, it must be stressed that this was permissible solely at this unique time and may never be repeated.

With Hashem's help, may we strive to emulate Pinchas' love and devotion to the Holy One blessed be He, and may we ever dedicate ourselves to His Torah and *mitzvot*. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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