

Parshat Pinchas 5777

After Pinchas acted with zealotry by killing Zimri and Kozbi, he was rewarded by G-d with the "Covenant of Peace". Aharon HaCohen- famously cited as Pinchas paternal grandfather at the start of the Sedra - is described as both (Ohev Shalom) "the Lover of Peace" and ("Rodef Shalom") "the pursuer of peace". Rabbi Frand cites the Brisker Rav, (Rabbi Yitzchok Zev Soloveitchik, (1887-1959) who said ,in the name of his father, Rabbi Chaim Halevi Soloveitchik (1853 - 1918) that we might have expected that G-d's reward to Pinchas to be "My Covenant of Zealotry or Bravery" but why, after killing what seemed like in "cold blood," was he rewarded by G-d with the "Covenant of Peace"? He answered that sometimes the real act of peace (of making peace between G- d and children of Israel) needs to be made in ways that appear less than peaceful.

The Netziv - Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (1817 -1893 answers that the Torah rewarded Pinchas by ensuring that the natural inclination such actions usually have on those who carry them out- i.e. violence begets violence, would not take effect in spite of the fact that his actions were violent and the antithesis of peace. Pinchas would remain a peace-loving, kind, and compassionate man. Chazal defined G-d's promise of peace to Pinchas and his descendants as being a personal and individual state of inner being. What is now colloquially referred to as "being at peace with one's self."

The Chasam Sofer – Rabbi Moshe Sofer -Schreiber (1762-1839) explains that the act of killing might not be associated with the "Lover of Peace" (Ohev Shalom), but it is associated with the "Pursuer of Peace" (Rodef Shalom). The terminology of `Rodef' in the expression "Rodef Shalom" is unusual. It seems to have connotations that do not fit in with the context of peace. The Chasam Sofer says that there are occasions, in order to make peace, a person must be "Rodef Shalom" i.e. chase away the peace. There are occasions when the ultimate peace is only achieved through a temporary act of pursuing (i.e. — chasing away) peace or separating such as Avraham and his nephew Lot.

The famous American born Jewish historian and writer, Rabbi Berel Wein cites the Talmud and Jewish tradition as believing that **only** Pinchas' act of zealotry is to be admired. All other subsequent acts of unilateral zealotry in Jewish society in later generations are to be shunned. This is a rare instance of the rule, *halakhah ve-ein morin kein*, "It is a law that is not taught" (Sanhedrin 82a).The prophet Eliyhau, who in Jewish tradition is identified with Pinchas, is chastised by G-d to moderate his

zealotry regarding the evils of Jewish behaviour in his time. Instead, he is assigned to be present at all circumcision ceremonies, Pesach sederim, and to be the prophet of Jewish redemption. He becomes the witness to Jewish loyalty and continuity, and the fulfilment of G-d's commitment to Pinchas of peace, nobility and eternal greatness. It is this redirection of zealous energy to positive force that lies at the heart of G-d's commitment to Pinchas. , Rabbi Wein said "*Yet, even this restoration of status as Cohen and G-d's confirmation of the rectitude of Pinchas is also somewhat reserved*".

Rabbi Wein also explains that Pinchas' act of zealotry is not universally accepted. He cites the way the letter "vav" in the word "Shalom", is split and cracked. He is not granted the full blessing of peace but rather a diminished portion of it. Chazal taught that this is because his heroics involved violence and the taking of human life, albeit in a necessary, just and holy cause. Peace obtained through violence and the death of others, even if those deaths which are unavoidably necessary and completely justified, is,- to quote Rabbi Wein "*always somewhat tarnished, cracked and split*". Although Pinchas is personally completely vindicated and rehabilitated by the Torah, there remains a lingering resentment against his act of boldness and zealotry.

Why this moral ambivalence, asks Rabbi Lord Sacks? He answers that the zealot is not acting within the normal parameters of the law. Zimri may have committed a sin that carried the death sentence, but Pinchas executed punishment without a trial.

Pinchas gave his name to the parsha in which Moshe requests that G-d appoint a successor. R. Menahem Mendel, the Rebbe of Kotzk, asked why Pinchas, was not appointed instead of Yehusha. His answer was that a zealot cannot be a leader. Leadership requires patience, forbearance and respect for due process. The zealots within besieged Jerusalem, in the last days of the Second Beit Hamikdosh, played a significant part in the city's destruction. They were, with the tragic consequences which continue to affect us to this day, more intent on fighting one another than the Romans outside the city walls.

In conclusion – to quote Rabbi Lord Sacks "*Nothing in the religious life is more risk-laden than zeal, and nothing more compelling than the truth G-d taught Elijah, that G-d is not to be found in the use of force but in the still, small voice that turns the sinner from sin. As for vengeance, that belongs to G-d alone*"