



From the desk of
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OHR

Parashat Pinchas

HAMELECH

Genuine Torah Zealotry- The Test

Our *parasha* states (*Bamidbar* 25:10-12), "And Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: Pinchas, the son of Elazar, the son of Aharon HaKohen, 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 vengeance. Therefore, say: I give him My covenant of peace."

Questions

1) For this act Pinchas was given "My covenant of peace." According to our Sages, Pinchas was also Eliyahu. He was blessed with a long life, until he rose up in a cloud to the heavens, and will eventually herald the arrival of *Mashiach*, may he come speedily in our day. The question is, however, how could an act of manslaughter earn such a tremendous reward?

2) If this is such an exalted act, why does it say in *Masechet Sanhedrin* (82a) that although to kill somebody under such circumstances is permitted, if somebody comes and asks us if he is allowed to do such a thing, we forbid him? If such an act of zealotry is praiseworthy, why do we not tell people to do it?

The Situation in Our Community

We are witness to many people who proclaim to be zealots for the Torah and wage war against

anything that seems to be against Torah ideology. They allow themselves to do whatever they feel is necessary to fight their battles and justify their actions by claiming that they are acting in the name of the holy Torah. However, if these people would examine their actions and motivations, they would often find that they have deluded themselves and are being manipulated by their *yetzer hara*. Their actions are not rooted in holiness but faulty character and personal interests, and to reassure themselves and save face, they claim that all their deeds are for the honor of the Torah.

The Test: Accepting Responsibility

It is possible to use the first question we asked to answer the second. To turn a brutal act of manslaughter into something else entirely, a person's motivation must be completely pure, without a trace of self-interest. Therefore, the Torah does not allow anyone and everyone to act as a zealot. Rather, only a person who is a true zealot, solely motivated by the honor of Hashem, is permitted to kill under these circumstances. A person must know that if he has any other motivation in this matter then he will not be considered a righteous zealot but a murderer, and he will be punished accordingly. In this manner, the Torah gives us a litmus test to determine our true intentions. A person should



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examine all of his actions in this manner and determine the true nature and driving force of his deeds. He will often find that he has fooled himself and was following his heart's desire, not Hashem's.

A Parable: The Difference Between Surgery Performed by a Doctor and an Ordinary Person

We can use a parable to bring out this point: When a person walks into a hospital and sees one man cutting another and taking out his internal organs, will he say that he is witnessing a murder? Certainly not! But what is the difference between this and witnessing a man on the street take out a knife and stab the fellow standing next to him? Other than the difference in location, there is an essential difference between the people doing the cutting. The man in the hospital is a doctor who has studied and trained for many years to be able to be a competent surgeon. He is performing surgery, not murder. However, the man with the knife on the street has no concept of medicine, so how can his actions be understood as anything other than murder? Just like a person's status and knowledge make the difference between surgery and murder, so too, a person's status determines whether he can be deemed a religious zealot. Only a person who has attained an extraordinary level of *yirat Shamayim*, whose actions are done

for the glory of Hashem, can be allowed to kill a man in the name of Hashem. However, an ordinary person who does not take all of Hashem's *mitzvot* seriously, is given no such privilege - if Hashem's honor was so important to him, he would not be lax with the other *mitzvot*.

R' Chaim of Brisk's Zealotry Test: Is He Happy to Have to do This?

I saw a beautiful parable from R' Chaim of Brisk on how to test the purity of our actions: Everyone knows that the mouse has two arch-enemies, the cat and the human housewife. But there is a fundamental difference between them. The cat eats mice and is thrilled when there are mice around. On the other hand, the housewife would prefer that she never saw the mice in the first place. In a similar fashion, can we determine if our zealotry is pure or not. Are we happy that we get to hurt the other person, or would we rather the whole sad story never happened? If it were up to Pinchas, Zimri would never have sinned, and it would have been unnecessary for Pinchas to kill him. Only after the Zimri sinned, Pinchas was left with no choice but to take care of the matter, much like the housewife in R' Chaim's parable. Until a person reaches this stage, it is unlikely that his zealotry is for the sake of Hashem and not for personal interests.



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R' Abramsky on the Extent that one Must Examine the Purity of His Deeds

The *Gemara* in *Berachot* 28b states that R' Gamliel asked if there was anyone who could compose a new blessing against heretics? Shmuel *Hakatan* accepted the task and composed the blessing. R' Yechezkel Abramsky asked: Is it so difficult to compose a new blessing? Why was only Shmuel *Hakatan* able to do this? R' Abramsky answered that this blessing was composed against the hated *Tzedukim* and against those who cast off the yoke of observance. Whoever composed the blessing, instead of only considering the desecration of Hashem's Name that was caused by the heretics' evil ways, would likely mix in his own personal feelings into the text of the blessing as well. Therefore Shmuel *Hakatan* had to be the one to compose this blessing, as it was his habit to say (*Avot* 4:19) "Do not rejoice in the downfall of your enemies, and when they stumble, your heart should not be glad" (*Mishlei* 24:17). This trait was enrooted in Shmuel *Hakatan*, and he would feel no joy in his enemies' downfall. If so, he certainly would not rejoice in the downfall of the *Tzedukim* and would be much happier if the *Tzedukim* had never existed. Such a person can be trusted to compose a blessing against his enemies without a trace of self-interest. I also saw this in the *Responsa* of *Kol Mevasser* (2:7): "The *gemara* in *Berachot* (28b) says that R' Gamliel asked if there

is anyone who knows how to compose a blessing against the heretics. Shmuel *Hakatan* accepted the task and composed the blessing. This requires clarification - why is it more difficult to compose a blessing against the heretics than any of the other eighteen blessings? The answer is that since this blessing is full of curses against our enemies and the enemies of Hashem, it requires a higher level of concentration and a purer state of thought to ensure that no unrelated personal interests creep into the prayer. This task requires a composer who will put his heart and soul into the task, to carefully choose the proper words and phrases. Therefore, they chose Shmuel *HaKatan*, who was known for his statement in *Avot*... The commentators explain that although Shlomo Hamelech was the author of this phrase, Shmuel *Hakatan* would encourage this trait and warn people to stay away from this sin."

It is Forbidden to Change the *Nusach Ha'tefila* (Prayer Text)

As a side point, we see from this *Gemara* that it is forbidden to change the *nusach ha'tefila*. To our great sorrow, our generation has seen an abundance of *siddurim* where the publisher changes the text of the prayers as if it's an insignificant matter. To show the significance of our *nusach ha'tefila*, I will mention the words of the *Chochmei Yisrael* who wrote on this topic: Our master, the *Chida* (*Responsa Chaim Shaul* 2:11) writes, "It is astounding - what great



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wisdom was required to compose a new prayer? Even children who know the holy tongue can do this? However, since in every letter of the *berachot* there are secrets involving the unification and combinations of the *Midot*, a great *chacham* who has *ruach ha'kodesh* is needed to ensure that the words of the *tefila* incorporate these secrets." R" Chaim Voloziner also writes at great length in *Nefesh HaChaim* (2:13) that we do not know the deep intentions that are in the *tefilot* written by the Men of the Great Assembly. He writes that the wondrous things that the *Arizal* has revealed in this are only a drop in the ocean of their true intentions. There are no men who walk the earth who can compose such wondrous and awesome prayers. *Yabia Omer* (Volume 5 *Orach Chaim Siman 12*) adds from the *Pnei Yehoshua* (*Berachot 28b*) that from this *gemara* we see that the number of letters and words in the *berachot* of *tefila* are based on great secrets, to make in impression Above. He adds from the *Shelah* that we shouldn't change even a minute amount of the *tefilot*, because such a change could destroy the world.

Gehenom for the Righteous - Mitzvot with Evil Aims

I saw a beautiful parable in the name of the *Sefer Ateret Chachamim*: There were two friends who studies Torah together. One decided to pursue the revealed Torah and one decided to engage in

Kabbalah. After many years, the two met and the first one asked his friend the Kabbalist what he achieved through his studies and to show him something of the wonders of Hashem. The Kabbalist asked him what he wanted to see, and his friend replied that he wished to see *Can Eden* and *Gehenom*. The Kabbalist agreed but only on the condition that his friend would ask no questions on what he saw - if he would ask a question, the image in front of him would vanish before his eyes. His friend agreed to the condition, the Kabbalist passed a certain cloth over his friend's eyes, and he saw the World to Come. First, he saw a gate on which was written, "*Gehenom* for Evildoers." He was amazed- is there a *gehenom* for the righteous, that the gate had to specify that this *Gehenom* is for the evildoers? However, he asked no questions. He saw the unimaginable punishments that evildoers suffered in *Gehenom*. He continued on his way and saw a gate that said, "*Gehenom* for the Righteous." He didn't understand how this was possible. The first thing he saw was a person being punished horribly for having mercy on a widow. Then he saw how a person was receiving a serious punishment for learning Torah out loud in the *beit medrash* between *mincha* and *arvit*. The third thing he saw was someone suffering for



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keeping *Shabbat*. At this point, he couldn't hold himself back and asked the Kabbalist to explain what he had just seen and the image vanished before him. The Kabbalist explained that in the first case, the person heard that *beit din* had ruled against a widow and began to curse and degrade the *beit din*. In the second case, the person was sitting in a *beit medrash* and the Rav began speaking between *mincha* and *arvit*. This person intentionally learned out loud to disturb and embarrass the Rav. In the last case, an individual had a critically ill person in his house on *Shabbat*. However, in his great piety, he decided not to violate the *Shabbat* to help the ill person. He was therefore punished in *Gehenom* for his *Shabbat* observance. We see that even if we do *mitzvot*, if there are impure motives lurking behind them, we will be punished.

Words of Mussar

We have learned from our *parasha* to what extent a person must examine and determine the root of his actions. Many times, he will find that the *yetzer hara* has fooled him into thinking that he is acting in the Name of Hashem, while his actions are really rooted in personal bias and self-interest. This is especially true in our times when, to our great sorrow, we see many acting in the name of the Torah, but in reality, they are

disgracing Hashem's Name in public by making the Torah community repulsive in the eyes of the general population. This is alluded to in the language of the *Mishna* in *Avot*, "Any dispute that is for the sake of Heaven, in the end will endure." The *Mishna* is alluding to the fact that someone who claims that his actions are for the sake of Heaven will maintain his position, as he does not believe that he is doing anything wrong. Therefore, the dispute will continue. We can attest to a similar phenomenon in our times. Our Arab enemies are prepared to destroy themselves to kill us. They are convinced that whoever succeeds in killing Jews becomes exalted. This deluded holy mission is what gives them the strength to continue their battle and destroy themselves. It is reasonable to suppose that we are being punished measure for measure since there are many in our own community who use the same trick and cloak their disgraceful actions in the Torah's name. However, the holy Torah obligates a person to put his zealotry to the test to save himself from error and ensure that his actions are pleasing to Hashem. May it be His Will that we do not err and that our actions should be pure and holy to bring *nachat ruach* to our Creator, *amen ve'amen*.

Shabbat Shalom

Rav Mordechai Malka